

# CAPTAIN POLLY OF ANNATOLIS



CAROLINE E. JACKSON





Class PZ7

Book J134 Capu

Copyright N<sup>o</sup>

COPYRIGHT DEPOSIT.

4



users of

Francise Lubw Wheeler

Ruth M. Kelly  
9





















"OH, RALPH, *where* DID YOU GET HIM? WHOSE IS HE? WHAT HURT HIM?"



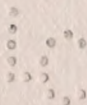
# CAPTAIN POLLY OF ANNAPOLIS

BY

GABRIELLE E. JACKSON

AUTHOR OF

"ADVENTURES OF TOMMY POSTOFFICE"



NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY

31 WEST TWENTY-THIRD STREET

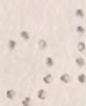
Ex



PZ 17  
J134  
Cap

S

COPYRIGHT, 1910  
BY  
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY





m. c. w. oct. 29 '10.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I.—WHICH INTRODUCES HER . . .	1
II.—HOW SHE GOT HER NAME . . .	14
III.—IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY . . .	28
IV.—CAPITULATION . . . . .	40
V.—ORDERS FROM THE CAPTAIN . . .	54
VI.—IN HONOR OF THE COLORS . . .	68
VII.—LAYING PLANS . . . . .	84
VIII.—WHEN OCTOBER CAME . . . .	103
IX.—AN HONOR DECLINED . . . .	118
X.—THE MU PHI PSI'S RIVAL . . .	132
XI.—THE MU PHI PSI'S MEETING . .	148
XII.—OUR FLAG AND SCHOOL . . . .	165
XIII.—A MESSAGE FROM OVER THE SEA .	181
XIV.—AT CHRISTMAS-TIDE . . . . .	201



CHAPTER	PAGE
XV.—CAPTAIN POLLY TO THE RESCUE .	218
XVI.—OFF FOR HAMPTON ROADS . .	234
XVII.—WELCOME HOME ! . . .	248
XVIII.—THE GREATEST DAY OF ALL .	262



## ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
“OH, RALPH, <i>Where</i> DID YOU GET HIM? WHOSE IS HE? WHAT HURT HIM? <i>Frontispiece</i> ✓	
SEATED HIMSELF UPON THE FLAT ROCK BESIDE HER . . . . .	10 ✓
FROM THAT HOUR RALPH AND POLLY WERE CUSTODIANS OF THE FLAG . . . .	86 ✓
POLLY STEPPED FROM BEHIND THE PALMS .	216 ✓
SHE WAS ABOUT TO TURN AND CREEP SOFTLY BACK . . . . .	228 ✓
“BROTHER SNAP! DEAR, DEAR BROTHER SNAP!” . . . . .	256 ✓







CAPTAIN POLLY OF  
ANNAPOLIS







# CAPTAIN POLLY

## OF ANNAPOLIS

---

### CHAPTER I

#### WHICH INTRODUCES HER

A WARM June morning with fleecy "white sheep" gamboling across a blue, blue sky, a soft wind, laden with the perfume of roses and newly mown grass; the whole world a glorious intoxicating green,—the shade of green which makes one wild to bury one's self in it; to get close to Mother Earth and "hear life murmur and see it glisten," when we know everything is "climbing to a soul in grass and flowers," and every fibre of our being is responding.

On a quiet, hillside road in the pretty town of Montgientian, with massive oaks, chestnuts, hickories, and innumerable other forest trees bordering it, and arching their mighty boughs overhead, a small figure sat perched upon a large, flat rock, her elbows



propped upon her knees, her chin resting in her cupped hands, her deep gray eyes, shaded by long, almost black lashes looking, looking, looking down the road, which ran straight from her until the perspective seemed to draw it to a sharp point. They were strange eyes, set rather wide apart, large, expressive, and of such a peculiar shade of gray as to seem almost a blue. Her friends often teased her by insisting that nature had marked her for a vivandière and intended her to be a soldier lassie; her eyes were so like the cadet blue of the West Point uniforms.

Until recently the owner of those eyes had been rather taken with that idea, but the previous winter had radically altered her view-point. But of that a little later. Had it not been for that change of attitude she would not at the present moment be seated on her flat rock, watching the road so intently while the sunlight filtered through the green foliage overhead and rested caressingly upon her glorious hair and exquisite skin. If the skin, and especially the retroussé nose, boasted a few freckles which exactly matched the copper-tinted hair, nobody cared a straw; they emphasized the skin's beauty, for it *was*



beautiful. The mouth, however, was the truest index to her character. A well-known writer has asserted that, "God Almighty makes all the other features, but a man makes his own mouth," and this assertion applies equally well to woman-kind. This mouth was as faultless in outline as a mouth well could be. Neither large nor small, the upper lip a dainty Cupid's bow, the under one its perfect mate, curved, rounded, soft, sensitive, yet both taken together were full of strong lines. It was the sort of mouth one delights in watching for it changed with every mood; indicated every thought; reflected each emotion.

No sound save the whispering of the leaves broke the silence of the woodland road, with its charming vista straight down the hillside to a lake at its foot; a lake now so calm that it reflected all the world round about it in the bluest of crystal mirrors, albeit it could grow wild and stormy enough upon occasion. With all its beauty it was considered a treacherous lake, though it rivalled in color the masses of gentians which later in the season would carpet woodland and uplands with the richest of velvet carpets, and which had given Montgentian its pretty name.



At the foot of the hill lay the town, a prosperous one of probably fifteen thousand inhabitants, and the suburb of a great city about twenty miles distant. Upon a clear day the city was distinctively discernible from the summit of the mountain which towered above this hill road.

Presently far down the road another figure appeared in view. The keen gray eyes instantly lighted up and were intently focussed upon the person approaching. The hands fell from the chin and rested upon the warm rock, as a prop to the figure now bending forward to get a better view. The new arrival did not seem to be a very remarkable individual as he drew near; indeed he was a mere stripling of a boy, probably twelve or fourteen years of age, though he looked even younger, and was thin and undeveloped. But there was a degree of resolution in the little chap out of all proportion to his slight build, so in contrast to the girl seated upon the rock, who was youthful vigor and health incarnate.

The boy was dark, or rather his hair and eyes were,—a deep chestnut brown,—although his skin was pale. He came panting up the road bearing in his arms a good-sized dog. Not a beautiful creature in



any sense of the word, and at present far from attractive, for he was as muddy as a mud turtle, and bore marks of recent disaster, for one foot was bound up with the boy's far-from-clean handkerchief.

Evidently he had come to grief and been rescued by his panting champion. The girl held out her arms and the next instant had the dog in her lap, mud and all, as she cried:

"Oh, Ralph, *where* did you get him? Whose is he? What hurt him?"

"Down in the village; I don't know whose he is; he got hit by an auto and his foot is squashed," panted the boy dropping down upon the broad stone beside the girl. "Gee! but he was heavy though. I lugged him all the way up. Part of the time he just yelled like anything, though he's only cried and whimpered a little during the last few minutes."

"Is his leg broken?"

"Don't think so; just smashed and hurts like the dickens. I would n't a-brought him here except that I had to come up with *this*, and thought maybe it was important; you never can tell about 'em, you know. Sometimes I've pretty near run my gizzard out 'cause I've thought somebody was dead or dyin', and when I've reached the place it



was just 'Congratulations on your birthday, Tommy,' or 'Baby's got a new tooth, Coosey.' Ah, I'd like to just smash such people. Then again when I've taken my time and gone slow and easy it would be a death message, or some awful thing, and I'd want to kick myself all over the place for not hurrying. But I've got to go on up to your house with *this*. Hope it ain't any bad news this time; I don't like to take bad news up there," and removing his cap the boy took from it an envelope.

The girl took it and eyed it as though the superscription could reveal the name of the sender. Evidently it did, for the gray eyes began to twinkle and the flexible lips to pucker whimsically.

Handing it back she said: "Hike along up, Ralph, I've been watching for you. It is n't bad news this time, I know. The message is for Constance."

"What'll I do with him, though?" asked Ralph, nodding toward the dog. "Oh, he's spoiled your dress. What did I ever let you take him for?" said the boy contritely.

"You did n't *let* me; I just did it. Who cares for the mud? Mud will wash off. Lie still—what's his name?"



“Rhody. Funny one, ain’t it; it’s on his collar, see? Will you keep him till I get back?”

“Maybe I’ll keep him all the time; he’s a good breed, don’t you see that? Now go on with that message, and I’ll see how this leg is. Lie still, Rhody, lie still, there’s a dear. I won’t hurt you any more than I can help, poor old fellow. Oh, what a shame!” as the handkerchief when removed revealed a terribly swollen paw. The dog, a thoroughbred Boston brindle, looked up at her with his queer, wide-set, pop-eyes, whined with pain, and then, by way of apology, made wild laps at her face and hands with his velvety tongue. The leg had been cruelly crushed, but the steady, light hand examining it could not discover any broken bones. It had evidently been a narrow escape, however, for the poor little victim of the speeding automobile must have had a hard knock, and a rough tumble heels-over-head through the mud. The girl smoothed, stroked, and crooned over her patient, and presently had him snuggled close in her arms, the injured foot held in her hand, which seemed to afford the dog a good deal of comfort, for he sighed now and again, occasionally punctuating his sighs



with a low whine when an extra sharp twinge shot through his leg. She had probably been sitting thus about fifteen minutes, too absorbed in her charge to take note of anything else, when she was aroused from her self-imposed duty by a high, clear whistle as some one drew near. As she glanced quickly up a swift transformation flashed across her strangely expressive face. She did not rise, but holding her charge, eyed the approaching stranger with a glance which might have pierced through him. He returned the look with interest, for two of the man's dominating characteristics were an admiration for a beautiful girl or woman, and his intense love of children. Here he found the object of both, for Polly Howland *was* both. The dog turned his head toward the whistler and wagged his stub tail. The effect of that wag upon the girl holding him was instantaneous; the lines of the mobile mouth softened perceptibly. The man was still at some distance, and the merry whistle continued as uninterruptedly as though his splendid dark eyes had never rested upon her, while in fact, they had not for a moment been withdrawn from her face, and now held a light of intense admiration.



The whistle, an old-time melody, familiar to many generations, filled the woodland with its high, clear, rollicking notes, as the man swung along to its rhythm. The wood road was rather steep, but it seemed to have no effect upon his splendid strength and endurance; the superbly set-up figure, with its perfect poise, its faultless play of muscles, bore down upon the rock as easily as though the road were the smoothest of floors. Presently the whistle changed to a song, and the words of the old melody, full of almost meaningless nonsense, fell upon Polly's ears, the refrain being,

“Sing-song Polly.”

Still no change upon that same Polly's part.

An amused twinkle filled the man's eyes. Within half a dozen feet of her he halted, came to attention, and saluted in a manner which secretly thrilled her soul. Then dropping his martial air, he raised his hat and bowed in the most approved manner of a well-bred citizen. That bow brought a second glow, although Polly would have died rather than let him suspect it.

Things were progressing most favorably



for the new arrival could he but have guessed it. As it was, he felt puzzled, and he had considerable reason to. A man does not undertake the errand upon which this man was bound without more or less perturbation of soul, however great his self-assurance.

"Miss Howland?" he questioned.

"No," was the imperturbable negative.

"Miss Polly, then?"

"To a very few,—yes," was the slightly disconcerting reply.

The man suppressed a smile, although his lips twitched a little. The gray, inscrutable eyes were fully aware of the twitch. Then he changed his tactics, swiftly carrying the war into the enemy's country by asking:

"Who am I?"

"You *may* be Mr. Hunter though I don't see how you *can* be quite so soon. He is not expected until to-night, or to-morrow at twelve."

"Nay, young lady, you mean eight bells."

The gray eyes shot a keen flash at him.

"No, I'm *not* Mr. Hunter," continued the man, "so who am I?"

"Mr. — Harry, perhaps," hesitated his *vis-à-vis*.





SEATED HIMSELF UPON THE FLAT ROCK BESIDE HER







"Clear out of your reckoning! Compass has deviated; needs adjusting; I'm afraid I've got to take it in hand," replied the man, as he bent over, pushed aside her skirts and seated himself upon the flat rock beside her with all the self-assurance of a boon companion, giving his hat a toss upon the soft turf. Then looking closely at the dog he asked: "What ails him?"

"He got hit by an auto down in the village. I don't know surely whether his leg is broken or not."

"We'll soon find that out," was the decisive answer. "Come here, old man," and the dog was lifted gently from the girl's lap to the man's. Happily for the state of his immaculate, dark-blue cheviot trousers most of the little beast's mud had been wiped off upon Polly's gown. The man's long, slender fingers examined the injured leg with as delicate a touch as a woman's. There was something singularly tender in his face as he did so. Polly watched him with a critical scrutiny.

"No bones broken here," was his comforting assurance. "Poor little beggar, it hurts like—er—blazes, does n't it?" he asked as though the dog could answer if he would. The dog whined and licked the



man's hands, but before he could question his four-legged patient further a serene voice remarked:

"You were going to say his foot hurt like the devil, were n't you?"

For one second the man looked at the refined little face upraised to his, a face which at the present moment bore a perfectly angelic expression, and then throwing back his splendid head simply roared until the forest rang.

Polly's expression did not change, although any one knowing her well would have been aware of a curious little twitching at the corners of the lips. They would also have understood exactly what that twitching indicated. It is not to be inferred that Polly dwelt in an environment where such language was a matter of course. On the contrary, those who have hitherto read anything of Polly Howland will hardly need be told that her home life was almost ideal, and its atmosphere as sweet and pure as any girl's could be. Nevertheless, Polly was endowed with the average number of faculties and they were of an exceptionally keen order. She had lived in the world more than twelve years and was an extremely independent little mortal.



When the man had laughed his laugh to the end, he put out his hand and said:

“ Shake! You got a rise out of me that time for fair. Now let’s get down to business. I don’t know your name,—at least I’m not supposed to, according to conventions, and you, according to the same rules are not supposed to know mine, but what is it the old song says, ‘ If you know me, and I know you, then we’ll both know one another.’ Let us get busy and prove it.”



## CHAPTER II

### HOW SHE GOT HER NAME

"LET me hold him; Constance says skirts are needed to make a decent lap, and although you're pretty big, I don't think you can make half as good a one as mine," was the convincing argument of Miss Polly Howland as she lifted her patient back upon her lap, at the same time glancing up at the person beside her.

There was something in the man's eyes which held her own; a longing, a yearning which was almost pathetic; the look which we sometimes see in the eyes of a homeless dog as he comes toward us, his question asked as plainly as articulate speech could ask it: "Have I any claim upon you? Will *you* claim me? I am so lonely, so forlorn, so in need of all you can give me."

There was a swift change in the gray eyes raised to his, and the mouth took tender curves as Polly said softly:

"I knew you the very minute I saw you,



although I did n't see *how* it could be you so soon. Constance said she did n't think you could possibly get here before six o'clock, but Ralph has just gone up to the house with a telegram. You sent it, did n't you?"

The man nodded but did not speak. Somehow his heart was very full just at that moment. During the past two weeks he had pictured this meeting many times, but never had the picture been duplicated, and the reality was as different from the mental one as realities usually *are* from our dream pictures.

"Yes, I know, and I've been trying to make up my mind what I must call you. I did n't want to meet you with all the grown-ups, and the half-grown-ups, around; they're sort of queer things, and you're not like any one else I could meet. You're just going to be *all* or nothing, and that has got to be settled while we are alone. So I'm glad you *did* get here ahead of time, and I happened to be on hand——"

"On *deck*," corrected her listener.

"Well on deck then. I had planned to see you first without having you see me, but it has happened a great deal better than I could have planned it after all. They are



not expecting you yet anyway. 'Connie is n't home—" here a shadow of disappointment passed swiftly over the fine face, but before it could become fixed Polly added quickly: "Oh, she's only gone down to the village to market and when she comes back she has *got* to come this way; there is n't any other you see." Sunlight broke over the man's face.

"Yes, that's true. It will be fully half an hour before she comes back, and we can have all that time to get to know each other. We may as well begin right off, for I dare say we've *got* to know each other pretty well—Connie settled all that down there in Annapolis—and, well—I'm rather glad she did, now I've seen you."

There was a quick intaking of breath upon the man's part, and his arm stole out to encircle the little girl's waist as he said softly:

"Polly, do you know what you are saying? Can you guess what your words mean to me, little girl?"

"I think so. I'm only a little girl, I know, and some people seem to think those two words mean just 'little fool,' but they don't know how much thinking we do way down inside ourselves. I love Connie better



than anybody in this world, excepting mother, of course, and she has talked to me a lot about you; told me how lonely you were sometimes, in spite of being so big and—and—splendid,” with a glance of keen admiration for the face bending lower and lower toward hers, as though the man were drinking in her words as a parched traveller eagerly quaffs refreshingly clear water. “And I don’t want you to be lonely any more than Connie does, only I *did* want to see you first all by myself.”

“And now that you have seen me, dear, can you give me the place in your heart and home I have come all this long way to claim? I want them very much, little girl.”

The man’s voice had grown very tender, and his eyes strangely soft as he asked these questions. Something in the tone must have moved the dog to a responsive mood, for with a low whine, he hunched himself toward him, and rested his head upon his knee.

The man smiled and said:

“Rhody vouches for me. Will you accept his guarantee and tell me the name I am to bear in future? I have already decided upon mine for you.”

The world all about them was very, very



still and beautiful just at that hour;—the hushed one bordering upon high noon, when Nature seems taking her siesta. The leaves overhead rustled softly; the sunlight and shadow lay in intoxicating patches upon foliage and turf; not far off a hermit-thrush voiced his heavenly notes. There was a strange emotion stirring in Polly Howland's breast. All her little world had been changed within the past six months and she had been trying hard to adjust herself to the new order of things; a harder process than those around her suspected. Her elder sister had been away from her during those six months for the first time in all their lives. During that interval, also, Polly had been desperately ill and Constance had returned to nurse her, but upon her recovery had gone back to Annapolis where a strong tie was forming to bind her. Polly felt instinctively that "Old times were changed: old manners gone," and that Constance could never quite fill her life as she had formerly filled it; that another must now be admitted to the home circle; a circle into which no man had stepped since her father's death when Polly was a very little girl, and Polly was not quite sure how she would regard the invasion, or if it would



assume the form of an invasion or an addition. It is hard to arrive at a decision regarding any human being without having seen him, and up to the present moment Polly's convictions had necessarily been purely theoretical. Now, however, here she had the sentient being before her upon whom she was to pass judgment. All this had rushed through her active brain much quicker than it has taken to put it on paper.

Then Polly the intuitive, Polly the positive, Polly the impulsive came to the front splendidly.

Turning her eyes to those still regarding her so longingly she did the thing most like Polly to do.

Raising her arms she clasped them about the man's neck, and drawing his head toward her, kissed him lovingly and tenderly, then nestling in his close circling arms she said very softly:

*"Brother Snap."*

There are certain natures to whom affection and the manifestations of it are as essential as air to life itself, and without this manifestation they as surely fail to attain to a perfect moral and mental development, as their bodies would fail if deprived of God's fresh air and sunshine. The man



holding Polly Howland in an embrace which was almost painful in its intensity, although she would have let him crush every bone in her willowy little body before flinching, had such a nature. From boyhood he had led a lonely life at first one boarding-school then another, until at last he entered the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis at eighteen, from which he had graduated ten days prior to this meeting with Polly. Constance, Polly's elder sister now in her twentieth year had spent the previous winter with her aunt in Annapolis, where Harry Hunter had met her, and when the June ball ended the academic year, and Harry Hunter was a graduated Passed-Midshipman, Constance Howland was his promised wife. Then Constance had immediately returned to her home in Montgentian, and as soon as he could settle the few business matters which claimed his attention at the Academy, Harry hurried northward as fast as steam could carry him, to spend the balance of his month's leave in the home of his fiancée and become acquainted with her mother and sisters whom he had not yet met. It was rather hard for all, for although well known to Mrs. Harold, Mrs. Howland's sister, whose home was in Annapolis,



Harry Hunter, or "Snap," as every one called him, since that had been his nickname at the Academy, was an entire stranger to Constance's relations. How he longed to change that attitude, and to become one of the family of which Mrs. Harold had told him so much, not even Constance suspected, dear as he had grown to her, and close as the past months had drawn them together, for Snap was a peculiar man in some respects. One after another his own family had slipped away into the Great Beyond, leaving him utterly alone in the world. True he had some warm friends, but fewer than the average man owing to a peculiar reserve, the outcome of an extremely sensitive nature. He was so afraid of an undue exhibition of sentiment, yet the man's whole nature was hungering for affection, and an abiding place in this big world which he could claim as his own; a roof to call "home," with those beneath it who would welcome him and give him the love he craved. At present he felt utterly adrift in the world, for the four years spent at the Naval Academy with only one month's leave each year unconsciously limits a man's horizon and when he graduates, unless he has a home to go to, and relatives to welcome him, he is



like a caged bird set free, and very often has about as much idea of how to shift for himself.

Snap had been one of the brilliant men of his class of two hundred, had graduated sixth, and "starred," which means that he had held an unusual average throughout the four years. Yet, perhaps of those two hundred graduates, there was not a lonelier man leaving the massive walls of Bancroft Hall behind him forever than Snap when he descended its broad granite steps for the last time. Huge, imposing, magnificent in its proportions as it is, Bancroft Hall is nevertheless, "Quarters" only, and bare and devoid of any element of home as any place can well be. Still, it had been the only home Snap had known for four years.

And now, what lay at the end of this enchanting woodland road? Was he, indeed, coming like the fairy prince in the dear old tale to wake the sleeping princess? But the "princess" had already wakened one perfect moonlight night back there in the beautiful colonnade of Bancroft Hall. He was sure of the princess. But the guardians of the princess? Her relations by whom she was cherished beyond words to express. How about those?



All these thoughts, all these memories, had been crowding through Snap's active brain as he journeyed toward the home of his princess, and when he left the train and started to walk up the hill, rather than drive up in one of the station cabs, they crowded, crowded, crowded thicker and faster than ever. He had sent his telegram to Constance to tell her that he would arrive earlier than she expected him, but local deliveries in a small place are necessarily slow. One small boy, not over robust, cannot cover a great territory quite as speedily as the magician in the *Arabian Nights* did upon his magic carpet. Constance expected a message telling her by which train Snap would arrive that afternoon; hence Polly's outlook for the boy expected to bring it up, but Snap had overtaken his own message. When he turned into the woodland road and spied the little picket-fairy of the princess's castle he instantly recognized her from the photograph Constance had shown him, and knew that the beginning of his ordeal was at hand. Yet no living being would have suspected from his manner that it was an ordeal for him. And *here* was the outcome: the first suggestion that he had, indeed, "*come home.*" Yet, Snap never knew how



delicately the scales had balanced; did not guess how a hair's weight might have tilted the bar the wrong way for his future happiness.

Polly was the youngest member of her family, it is true, but Polly's character was as forceful as any of her older relatives. Had Snap failed to ring true to her sounding the gulf between them would have been impassable for all time; nothing could have bridged it. It was a happy chance which prompted Polly to do picket duty; a happy chance which brought Ralph Wilbur, and the luckless Rhody up the hill; a happy chance which prompted that little beast to instantly adopt Snap as his chosen friend. Had Snap shown indifference to Rhody's tribulations the hair's weight would surely have fallen upon the wrong side of the scale.

And now? Just once before in his whole life had Snap been nearer an earthly paradise. Constance had often heard him say: "I can't pass a child upon the street without longing to catch it up in my arms," and the children of the officer's families openly adored him.

When Polly voluntarily put her arms around him and pressed her lips to his, Harry Hunter experienced one of the sweetest mo-



ments of his life and never in later years could the memory of it lose its vivid outline. Polly could hear and feel the great warm heart throbbing as she nestled in his arms. For a few minutes neither spoke. Snap could not have done so, and Polly realized that the moment was too sacred to be profaned by speech. Polly was a delicately attuned little instrument.

Presently Snap said very, very softly:

“My little sister! My little sister! Do you know you have indeed made this a home-coming for Brother Snap?”

“I wanted to,” whispered Polly. “I love Connie so dearly, oh, *so* dearly, and at first, —at first it seemed as though we were going to lose her; as though you were going to take her away from us forever, but now I know you’re not; I know—I—know——”

“Yes, dear, what is it you know?”

“I know that instead of losing Connie we are going to have *you* to love hard—hard,” and a rapturous hug emphasized Polly’s words.

“You have won and will hold me forever, little one. Connie is my Admiral, whose wishes and will there is no gainsaying; but you, honey—can you guess the name I shall hereafter call *you* by?”



"What?" asked Polly eagerly.

"Captain Polly, whom I salute here and now. Not a regulation salute perhaps, but the most binding one in the world," and taking Polly's face in his hands, Snap pressed his lips to her eyes, her cheeks, her lips, and then held the face clasped while he read the love which had been born for him in the wonderful depths of those gray eyes.

The effect of that caress upon two people was vastly different. To the young girl coming slowly through the woods by a little path which ran parallel with the road it brought a light into the starry brown eyes, and a glow to the velvety cheeks which would have delighted an artist's soul.

Hidden by the foliage she stood with clasped hands drinking in all it augured. To another individual who came running down the road it brought worse than consternation; it brought a rage out of all proportion to his slight figure; a fury which made him forget that the man seated there upon the ground caressing Polly Howland, could have crushed him with one hand were he so minded.

Ralph Wilbur paused not upon the order of his going. He went straight to the mark like the projectile from a twelve-inch gun,



and his onslaught caused almost as much havoc and consternation. Flinging himself upon the astonished Hunter he shrieked in his boyish treble:

“Take your hands off Polly Howland, you—you—great big coward! How *dare* you kiss her? How *dare* you?”



## CHAPTER III

### IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY

A MAN in the act of embracing a lady is at a decided disadvantage when attacked by an outraged rival. If he turns upon his assailant, the lady is left unprotected; if he fails to protect himself, he may suffer disaster. It is rarely the lady herself who fills the breach, but the person counting upon Polly Howland to do the thing which the average mortal would do in a crisis might also count upon the utter rout of his or her calculations.

When Ralph Wilbur descended upon Snap, that man was so completely taken by surprise that his small assailant had landed two or three mighty Lilliputian blows with his tightly-clenched fists before Snap could quietly raise an arm and brush him gently aside, but in that little fleeting moment an avenger of the outraged had, like Minerva, sprung into existence fully armed for battle,



and, if necessary, sudden death. Ere Ralph could draw three wholesome breaths, a little fury had grasped him by his jacket collar with one hand, while the free hand boxed his ears with a zest which made a whole galaxy of stars do a sailor's hornpipe before his eyes, and his unoccupied ear was vaguely conscious of a torrent of words descending upon it.

"Ralph Wilbur, you—you hateful, good-for-nothing boy! You horrid, meddling busy-body! How dare you! How *dare* you hit my brother Snap! How *dare* you come peeking and spying on us this way!" (If Polly had not been so deeply engaged, it is safe to say that she might have been aware of Ralph's approach, for certainly his footfalls had not been muffled as he rushed upon them, nor had his tones been a hushed whisper.) "You let my brother Snap alone and if he wants to kiss me he *may*, and it's just a thousand times nearer to me than *you'll* ever get, you—you——"

"Polly! For mercy's sake! Do you mean to murder Ralph before our very eyes?" asked a voice divided between consternation and laughter. "Let go of him this instant!" and a firm hand plucked



Miss Polly Howland from her well-nigh exhausted victim, and pushed said victim beyond the reach of the avenging hand. It was all over in less than two minutes, but at the end of them one small, Titian-haired damsel stood glaring at a sorely dishevelled small boy, a young man was putting straight a disordered cravat and smoothing his hair, while a forlorn little Boston terrier sat whimpering in a huddled heap and licking a swollen paw. Poor Rhody had come to grief a second time, for when Polly sprang to Snap's rescue Rhody was straightway forgotten and tumbled heels-over-head out of her lap.

Constance was the first to recover her wits. Though still retaining her hold upon Polly lest she again fly at Ralph, who stood barely ten feet from them glaring at the strange man who had brought all this to pass, and almost sobbing in his eagerness to be up and at such a barefaced villain, Constance reached her disengaged hand toward that same dreadful man, and into her eyes sprang a light which even the perturbed Ralph recognized as something beautiful and heretofore unknown, and in her voice sounded a note he had never before heard, as she said:



"Oh, Snap, Snap, what a welcome home for you, dear!"

Then, to add to Ralph's complete consternation, this incorrigible man gave one mighty stride forward, and the next minute held Miss Howland in his arms, and—audacities of audacities!—was pressing his lips to hers, while Polly rapturously hugged them both and cried derisively:

"So now, Mr. Smarty, you thought you knew pretty nearly everything in the world, did n't you? But you did n't know my *brother* Snap of the U. S. N., sir! And after this you 'd better find out what you 're about before you sail straight in to fix everything up."

"But—but—but *how* was I to know? *She* was n't anywhere in sight, and nobody ever knew you *had* a brother, and, and I don't believe he *is* your brother either, so—there—now!" was the defiant answer.

There was an ominous light gathering in the gray eyes, and a direful tightening of the mobile lips, but before further issue could arise, Snap took matters in charge.

"Dear heart," he said tenderly to the girl dearer to him than his own life, "I reckon I've rolled in here as a very sizable apple of discord; pretty near as big as a water-



melon if I can judge by the stir-up I've caused. Let me straighten it out if I can before we go on up yonder—*home*. Captain Polly, I salute you, sir. As Executive Officer may I command Midshipman Bantam yonder to fall in for orders? I don't know his true name yet—I'll learn it presently—but that one fits like a body-bound bolt. 'Attention to orders!'"

Instantly Ralph drew his heels together and braced his shoulders. He had been in school long enough to gather a vague idea of what the word "attention" implied anyway, though he was still quivering partly from rage and partly from nervousness, and in spite of his most heroic efforts to control them his lips would tremble and his eyelids blink.

Snap appeared to be oblivious of both as he braced his shoulders in a manner which set secret thrills of admiration running down the spine of the small man facing him, and caused two feminine hearts to beat with delight.

"Now, Mr. Bantam, I wish to ask a question or two which you will do well to answer with judgment."

"Yes, sir." The voice was a trifle shaky.

"I would like to know by what right you



fall upon and assail an officer of the United States Navy on the public highways of this delightful town of Montgentian?"

"I—I—did n't know you *were* an officer, and, I don't believe you *are*. Officers wear uniforms."

"Do I look like a brigand that you doubt my respectability?"

"No—no, sir, not a brigand, but—but—just a little like a pirate; you're so dark," was the honest reply.

Executive Officer had considerable ado to keep his countenance at this juncture, but somehow managed to, though he dared not turn to look toward a certain pair of laughing eyes just behind him.

"Ah, do I?" he queried. "Well, I've been compared to several distinguished individuals, or creatures, in the course of the past twenty-three years, but this is the first time I've attained to the honor of resembling the redoubtable Captain Kidd. Great old party! Ever read of his doings?"

"Yes, sir—lots!" There was a ring of enthusiasm in the tone.

"Bad lot, near as I can make out; better not take him for your model. Did no end of mischief, and was not a pleasant companion."



“Well, the books don’t say that he *kissed* people, anyway,” was the thrust next given.

Snap laughed in spite of himself. Then asked seriously:

“How do you know that? If Captain Kidd had met anything half as bonny and lovable as this, do you think he could have helped kissing her?” and Snap laid his arms caressingly across Polly’s shoulder and drew her close to his side, Rhody and all, for Polly had once more gathered the little dog into her arms.

Ralph’s lips tightened again. Snap resumed quickly:

“But you have not answered my question and much hinges on the answer.” It came with a rush:

“I was n’t going to let you, nor anybody else, kiss Polly Howland if I could help it. You think I’m just nothing but a Western Union Telegraph boy and have got to run my legs most off every day, and get blowed up by all kinds of people, and do things I hate like blazes *to* do, but I’m a *gentleman’s* son, and my mother’s a lady, just like Mrs. Howland, and she’s Mrs. Howland’s friend too, and—and Polly Howland’s mine, and—and I’m not going to be a messenger boy forever. I’m only



one now 'cause I want to help, and I can earn enough money this way to buy my shoes and clothes, and that's—that's better'n loafin' and taking mother's money when I'm more'n fourteen years old. When I've got through the High School I'm going to do—to do—well, I'm going to do something *great* and don't you forget it either. This job is just summer work. You think I'm just no 'count because I'm so blamed little and skinny, but just you wait. Maybe I'll never be as husky as *you* are. But I'll bet I can make my brains grow even if I can't make my body, and you just quit standin' up there and running me 'cause you're big and think it's smart, and you know you've got the bulge on me all right, all right. *I* call you just a big bully!"

The words ended in a boyish howl of rage as Ralph, regardless of orders or discipline, cast himself upon the soft woodland earth and, burying his face in his arms, fought out a man's battle in his boyish soul.

Into the fine eyes of the man sprang a light of intense admiration. Then they softened wonderfully as, stooping, he took Polly's face in his hands, kissed her very tenderly, and said:



"Honey, will you and Connie walk on up the road a little way and wait for brother Snap? Sweetheart," turning to Constance, "as upon many former occasions, I may have something to regret, though I'm sanguine enough to believe I shall not in this instance, for there lies *a man*. I did not suspect it at first, but I *know* it now. Go with Polly, dear heart, and wait up yonder beneath that great white birch for me. I must make good here and—well—I was once a kid myself and got a good bit shunted about the world; more than I like to think any other kid may if I can help it."

"I knew you would be quick to understand. Yes, dear, Polly and I will wait for you up yonder. And, O Snap, you *are* dear to me—so dear. These little acts are so much more a part of you than you suspect."

"If so they are rather a recent development which those back yonder in Annapolis would never suspect I'd be capable of standing for, I reckon, and but for you I should n't. Whatever is good in me *you* have discovered and brought to the surface. God bless you for it!" and swiftly the girl's face was taken in the man's hands and his



lips pressed to her eyes, which had grown limpid at his words.

She did not reply, but taking Polly's hand turned and walked slowly up the road.

Snap watched them a moment, all that was finest, noblest, best in him shown in the face he turned toward them. Then murmuring: "Man, when you met Constance Howland you met your salvation, and you'd better thank God for it with every breath you draw," the next second he was seated upon the ground by the prone figure. Laying his hand upon the slight shoulder, he said:

"Old chap, I beg your pardon for running you, and you can get up and knock my block off if you want to; I deserve it, and I won't raise a finger to stop it; but before you sail in, will you listen to a word or two that I want to say?"

There was a slight hunch of the shoulders, and an inarticulate sound from the face buried in the arms.

"After all, there is n't so very much difference in our ages, is there? Only nine years at best, and nine years are not such a lot when you count them quickly. Yet it does seem a big stretch when you're looking forward instead of backward, I'll admit.



I wish I were looking forward as you are; there'd be a heap of things I'd change, I tell you. But take a brace, old man, and sit up. I know you're sore as a crab, and I don't blame you a little bit, but I did n't understand then, and—well, yours was a flank attack in a way; you caught me unprepared. You see it isn't every man comes to visit his future wife and finds an A-1 little sister right on hand and ready to welcome him as Polly welcomed me, and the two experiences together went to my head I guess."

Slowly the little figure beside him drew itself together and rose up. Slowly it turned toward him a face from which it bravely sought to banish the traces of those disgracefully unmanly tears. Snap turned and looked up the road toward the figures seated beneath the white birch. Ralph took advantage of the opportunity thus given, and hastily drawing his handkerchief from his pocket removed as best he could all traces of that lapse which had mortified his very soul. When Snap turned toward him once more, the handkerchief had been restored to its pocket and he sat staring straight before him.

Snap held out his hand.



"Will you shake and forget it?" he asked. "I'm no end sorry—honest. Perhaps I'm not old enough yet to see as far behind me as I ought, and so I go blundering in with both feet. Then—I didn't know Polly. Any man would spunk up for *her*; she's just like Connie, and any one who dared—well, if I thought——"

"Are you honest going to marry Miss Howland?" broke in Ralph. "'Cause if you are, that changes the whole thing, of course. Polly *will* be your sister then, even if she is n't *yet*. But—" and the sentence was left incomplete.

"If *you* loved a girl and had a pretty good notion she loved you, what would *you* do?"

"I'd marry her, you bet, and that's just exactly what I'm going to do when——"

"Steady! Pipe down, old man. We won't mention names. Let me guess a little. All right, and don't you change your mind, and go in and win if you can make good—in every way—but go slow. You've got a heap to do in the course of the next eight or nine years. How do you mean to set about it? What's your line?"

"What's yours?" was the prompt counter question.



## CHAPTER IV

### CAPITULATION

THE man looked at the boy for a moment, then answered:

“That’s a question I’ve been trying to answer for four years. I’ve been trying to persuade myself that I’m a full-fledged officer in Uncle Sam’s Navy, and four years ago I thought it a sure thing,—oath taken, brass buttons and all. Then I got down to business and began to realize that I was nothing but a plebe and up against a few things I’d never dreamed could be; *that* was in hazing days back yonder,” with a nod somewhere in the direction of the South,—vague but significant to his hearer. Then came youngster year and I began to feel that I might after all claim the right to live. In second-class year I was a fool. In first-class year I found my salvation, and that’s why I’m here to-day. I graduated, and now I have the honor of being a Passed Midshipman of the United States Navy.



It takes a lot of words to say it, but after all I'm neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, though I have the privilege of hustling in all three capacities for the next two years. *Then*, if I'm lucky and pass my exams, I'll be an Ensign and——"

Snap broke off suddenly and glanced toward the white birch. Ralph's eyes followed him. Somehow the boy's mind had followed with singularly keen comprehension each word the man had spoken.

"Two years is an awful long time to wait, ain't it?" he asked with seeming irrelevance.

The dark eyes came swiftly back to the brown ones raised to them.

"Son, sometimes it seems an eternity, especially when I think of what a heap of regeneration I need to be put through, and the work which must be done to fit me to walk beside that little girl yonder for the rest of my days. And then again they don't seem half long enough to accomplish all I want to. That's worse than a problem in math, for you, is n't it?"

The curly brown head wagged negatively:

"Guess it is n't so hard to understand as you think. I know I look little and I *am* little; I have n't grown much lately somehow, though maybe I'll get a start



pretty soon, but I'm pretty strong for all that. I can do any fellow of my size. See that muscle?" and the shirt-sleeve was rolled up to lay bare a little broom-handle of an arm with some faint ripple of muscle visible as the arm was drawn up in a truly aggressive manner.

Without a change of countenance Snap ran his wonderfully sensitive fingers along that pipe-stem arm which without half trying he could have snapped with a single turn of his wrist, and as he did so the arm flexed, leaving the hand lying limply in his own. Such a slender, bony little hand, and none too clean either. Snap's was as near perfect as a hand could be, the long, filbert-shaped nails beautifully cared for. The contrast seemed to strike the boy, for he regarded both the hands critically, then remarked:

"Gee! but yours looks like a girl's hand, does n't it? It is so *clean* and—and—oh! so fixed up,—the nails, I mean, look so nice. You must wash 'em an awful lot, and what do you do to your nails? I don't believe you ever do anything that makes 'em get black and dirty, do you now?"

"A heap of things. Coal ship when we're cruising, work in the foundry and



machine shop back yonder, go out in cutter-drill and get all mucked up, and grub around generally.

"Then how the deuce do you *do* it?" was the incredulous question.

"Heap o' washee, as John Chinaman says. Suppose I let them stay smudgy, do you think I'd ever dare take Miss Constance's in them?" and a whimsical smile crept into the dark eyes. The brown ones were perfectly serious as they were bent upon Snap's hand.

"That's so. Say, maybe that's the reason Polly won't ever let me touch hers." The eyes were raised questioningly.

"Lot in that. Girls hate anything messy, and especially a sloppy man. Haven't much use for that sort myself." At this juncture Ralph glanced quickly over his own toilet. It had suffered considerably from his humanitarian act toward Rhody. Then he tried to withdraw the grimy hand, but the long fingers tightened slightly over it and held it imprisoned as Snap shook his head, and with one of his rare smiles which seldom failed to win, said:

"Let it rest where it is, old chap; we can talk better then. I can't keep the girls waiting much longer, but I want to ask you



a few questions; of course, you need n't answer if you don't want to, but I thought maybe I could boost things along a little for you. Just a hazy notion of mine, but I'd have been mighty glad of a boost or two when I was your age. Might have saved me some pretty hard bumps later. Now I've told you my line, what about yours?"

"I've got two more years in High School, and then I thought I'd try for college. I want to be a civil engineer if I can. Only trouble is we haven't got a blamed thing to do with any more. Father died two years ago, and since then mother's done a lot of things. She used to sing mighty well and had a place down in the choir at St. John's, then something got the matter with her throat and all that was knocked out ker-slump. Then she tried sewing, but she was n't strong enough for it, and now she is down in the Library. She likes that but, gosh! we have to scrimp like anything to keep our flat and get enough to eat. I wanted to go to New York ever so long ago; I know a fellow who gets six dollars a week and he ain't as old as I am neither, but he looks about sixteen, he's so big and husky. But mother's just as set as cement when



she makes up her mind, and she says education *must* come first. You see she's just stuck on an education, for father was a Princeton man, and she graduated from college too. Oh, we used to be different before father failed in his business and got sick. I'm doing *this* for the reason I said," and Ralph pointed to the telegraph blank lying upon the ground beside his cap.

"And a right plucky chap I call you. Listen here: How would you like to enter the Navy and become an officer?"

"Just like you?" and Ralph almost bounded to his feet in his eagerness.

"A heap better than I ever thought of being, I hope. But would you like it?"

"You bet I would! How can I? What must I do? When must I begin? I wonder if mother would let me. Oh, gee! Would n't that be great! Come quick, let's tell Polly!"

"Slow down! Slow down, old man! We'll tell Polly pretty soon, but you and I have kept both Polly and Constance waiting too long already. Now pay attention to me two minutes longer. Here's my card. Give it to your mother, tell her all about our meeting, every word, mind you, and tell her I beg her permission to call



upon her before I leave Montgentian in order to talk all this over. There may be a heap more than just chance in it, you know. If you were to ask Miss Constance I reckon she'd say the Sky Pilot had the running of this little job, and I don't think she'd be out of her reckonings either. But if you and your mother mean to take my hint seriously there's a heap to be thought out and done between this and prep year, and, say, son, you've got to do a power of growing, do you know that? You've got to measure 5 ft. 2 in. and weigh 105 lbs. at least to begin with, and I've got to tell you how to set about doing both."

"Can you? Is there any way I can grow *both* ways? So, and so," and Ralph raised his hand above his head and then extended both sidewise as the possible width to be attained. There was a wide discrepancy between the number of cubic inches of air his small frame displaced and the possible number he aspired to.

"Easier thing than you believe. But now we must be moving. You hike on down yonder to your office, they'll think you're taking a—a—well, a mighty long time to deliver that message, and I've kept the girls waiting just twice as long as I meant



to," and Snap rose from his earthy seat, dusted off his clothing, and then scrubbed off his small companion's.

"But when—when will you see mother, and when can I see you again? And how about Rhody yonder?"

"Are we chums?" asked Snap, seriously.

"You bet your life, if you'll let me be!" was the positive answer.

"Well, then *trust* me. Now beat it while your shoes are good," and picking up Ralph's cap he gave it a hasty dusting off, instinctive act of Bancroft Hall days, clapped it upon the boy's head, and facing him toward the town, said "Hike!"

Without another word Ralph rushed off down the hill at a pace which presently brought him breathless to the W. U. T. office where a sharp reprimand for his tardiness awaited him, but Ralph's head was too near the stars for so mundane a trifle to move him.

Meanwhile, Snap strode quickly toward the white birch, to be met half way by Polly, who hurled herself upon him asking eagerly, although to one of keen deduction the voice held a note of defiance as well as curiosity:

"Did you give him a good sound scolding! I guess he deserved it. Or did you



tell him never to cut up like that again as long as he lives and breathes?"

"Neither, honey. He's all right, that little chap, and big things lie ahead if I'm not mistaken in my man."

"Oh, tell me all about it—please do," begged Polly, clinging tightly to the hand which had been so naturally laid upon her shoulder, and looking eagerly up to the face which was smiling down upon her own bonny, eager one.

"Not now, Captain. Admiral's waiting yonder and our own affairs must wait."

By this time they had nearly reached Constance, who had risen to her feet and stood smilingly waiting for them. Rhody was lying at her feet. Snap instantly came to attention and saluted, Polly imitating him like a small automaton. Rhody's "fatally twisted" tail beat the "recall" upon the ground.

"What orders, sir?" asked Snap.

"Mother and mess call," laughed Constance. "Have you any idea of the time, you dawdling man? It is long past twelve and our luncheon is served at one, and before you can get a mouthful you've got to meet mother and Gail and be inspected. Oh, you may well quail! Gail's eyes are



as sharp as needles, and mother's are quite merciless——”

“No such thing!” protested Polly. “They are as brown, and soft as—as—as a bossy's and just as kind too. Don't you believe her, brother Snap, and don't you be scared of mother a bit. *I'll* take you to her and stand by you every single minute.”

The thought flashed through Constance's mind of the gentle, lovable little mother up on the hill from whom her three daughters had yet to hear a sharp word, and of her eager, if admirably suppressed restlessness as the day to meet her future son-in-law drew nigh; of her painstaking forethought that his welcome should be the welcome to an own beloved son; that no shadow of that chilling term “in-law” might fall upon him from her. Then she looked at this splendid specimen of manhood before her. How tiny and frail her mother would seem beside him! How potential the ensuing half hour would be for her, for her mother and for Snap! How little her mother suspected Snap's near presence! She was not expecting him until late in the afternoon. Well, perhaps it was better that he should arrive when least expected after all,—for it is usually the unexpected event which turns



out best in the end. Then her eyes softened and she said:

“Come—home—dear.”

“Gladly, sweetheart,” was the hushed answer.

“But Rhody,” cried Polly. “He can’t walk all that way; I must carry him.”

“By your leave, Captain,” interrupted Snap, and stooping down he lifted the little dog into his arms.

“Now forward, march!” he said.

With Polly jiggling along on one side fast hold of his free arm, Rhody snuggled as close to him as he well could snuggle, and Constance walking at his other side, her face radiating the happiness which filled her heart, the odd group started up the hill. It was not a long walk, and it was a very beautiful one. As they drew near the house, Constance saw Gail at an upper window and waved her hand to her. Gail sprang to her feet and stood staring at them as though she could not believe the evidence of her own senses, then she vanished and Constance laughed under her breath. Well she knew that Gail had bolted for the dining-room in order to have the extra cover laid for the unexpected guest for luncheon.

Snap had not seen anything of it; his



eyes had been riveted upon a figure which at that moment pushed open the screen door giving upon the broad piazza and was now standing at the head of the steps watching the approaching group. In her hand she held an unopened telegraph envelope. She was a small, dainty, little body, gowned in the softest of lavender-sprigged muslins, with dainty lavender ribbon belt, and dainty lavender ribbon bows at throat and wrists. Her skin was soft and fair, her hair a rich brown braided in soft heavy braids and coiled about her beautifully poised head; her features perfectly regular, and the mouth gentleness and tenderness itself. But the eyes were the truest index to her character. As Polly had said, they were brown and soft as a bossy's; the kind of eyes into which babies smile responsively; the kind that children trust instinctively; the kind which win the confidence of young people instantly, and older ones turn to in an hour of trial. Eyes which reveal a soul so pure, so lovable, so unselfish that intuitively those looking into them feel: "This woman can love with all her heart, with all her soul, with all her strength, and with all her mind; truly loving her neighbor as herself, and with justice. In her will be found gentle-



ness coupled with strength, and her children shall rise up and call her blessed."

As the two reached the foot of the half-dozen steps leading up to the piazza, Constance glanced up and into her eyes flooded a look of faith and confidence beautiful to behold. The answering look was one of the most perfect understanding and a slight nod and a gentle smile accompanied it. Polly's face held a radiant triumph, as though she were saying:

"Is n't he all and lots more than Connie told us?"

But into Snap's had sprung a light which went straight to the mother heart waiting to welcome him, and she did exactly what the mother heart prompted. With a look which Snap never forgot, she extended both arms to him.

Tossing his straw hat upon the grass, he turned to Polly and said:

"Take Rhody, dear," and then with one bound was up three of the steps, clasped in the arms waiting for him, his head bowed upon her shoulder, his arms about her as she said:

"My boy! My boy! Welcome home, dear!"

"Come, dearie," said Constance. "We



will go into the house with Rhody," and without a protest Polly followed. She felt the moment too sacred to be desecrated by other eyes.



## CHAPTER V

### ORDERS FROM THE CAPTAIN

LUNCHEON was over and the girls and Snap were seated upon the shady piazza with its beautiful view of the broad valley and Lake Caprice spread before them. Snap sat between Constance and Gail smoking, and enjoying his after-luncheon cigarette as only a man of his unusual temperament could. Polly had disappeared soon after luncheon, and Mrs. Howland was occupied for the moment with some domestic arrangements. Snap's hand lay upon Constance's which rested on his knee, but his eyes were upon Gail; Gail the bonny, the merry, the altogether irresistible in her sixteen years of perfect girlhood. Jolly, fun-loving, absolutely unaffected Gail. As Snap's dark eyes rested upon her he smiled a quizzical little smile and said, though the long slender fingers tightened slightly over those beneath his own as he spoke:



“Talk about a man falling upon his feet. By Jove, I feel as though I’d as many as a centipede and had lit on every one of them. For a good many years I knocked around boarding-schools and never knew what home and family meant; I was too far away from mother ever to know any home life with her, and then—then I lost her, you know. Four years down in the Academy aren’t exactly what we would picture as fireside comforts, with your Lares and Penates smiling at you from either side your hearth-stone. The first hint of home life I had while down there was given by ‘The Little Mother’——”

“Who?” interrupted Gail.

“Your Aunt Janet. We all call her that, for that is exactly what she is to us all. And now I’ve come up here and found a real one, and you. I tell you, Connie, it’s a lucky thing for *you* I didn’t meet Gail first; you’d never be the future Mrs. Hunter.”

“Well, upon my word! For all the self-conceit ever expressed that *is* the very limit. Don’t for a moment hesitate to change if the other lady suits you better and is willing,” was Constance’s bantering retort, while Gail colored and laughed with all a



girl's happy, care-free mirth, then flew back at Snap with:

"I think I'll wait until it comes *my* turn to visit Aunt Janet, and *then* I'll take my pick, sir. With so many men down yonder I mean to make a careful choice, and—well—since I've seen a specimen I rather approve of the type. Thank you, I'll wait a year or so and *then*——"

"Great Scott! Who mentioned conceit, audacity, and a few of the other minor virtues?" cried Snap, leaning forward to flick the ash from his cigarette. As he settled back in his chair, a pair of soft hands were slipped beneath his chin, drawing his head gently upward and backward until his eyes were upturned to meet a pair smiling kindly and amusedly into his own. He had not heard Mrs. Howland approach through the living-room window, or step upon the piazza, though she had overheard their conversation. Snap strove to rise to his feet, but, if delicate, the hands were stronger than he thought and he was at a disadvantage.

"What are these girls saying to my—son?" she asked, bending down to rest her face against the wonderfully silky hair.

Instantly the cigarette was tossed over the piazza rail as Snap's hands were raised



to cover those encircling his chin, and his eyes softened to a tenderness which thrilled the older woman's soul.

"Reckon I started the fracas—as *per usual*," laughed Snap. "You don't know my ability in that direction yet, Mrs.—No! I *can't* call you *that*. This is home, and pretty close to heaven,—as close as I ever deserve to get, may be,—and I'll never forget my welcome to it as long as I live. You can never be Mrs. Howland to me; it must be a name all your own. Mrs. Harold is 'The Little Mother,' and always will be, for she was the best friend I ever had, but *you* are the little girl's mother. When I've really the right to call you mine, no name will ever be dearer to my lips, but meanwhile—during the two necessary years of probation—what is it to be?" and the dark eyes looked earnestly into the gentle brown ones.

"Whatever one you decide upon will be very precious to me, dear."

There was a moment's silence in which Snap's keen mind worked rapidly. Foreign languages had always been easy for him to acquire, and the little idioms of French, German, or Spanish fell as easily from his tongue as his own. Then he asked softly:



"May it be *Carissima*? You are that to me. Much dearer than you guess, for the soil was ripe for the sowing and the moment auspicious."

"None could be more beautiful to me. I thank you, dear," and her lips were pressed swiftly to the eyes turned up to hers. Constance's were suffused when Snap looked toward her, and Gail's usually dancing ones were filled with a tender light. Moving to the other side of Constance, Mrs. Howland slipped into the unoccupied porch chair, and as she did so Constance's arm encircled her, and the girl whispered as she pressed her lips to her mother's cheek:

"Have you any idea how happy you have made me by taking *him* right into your heart as you have, Mother?"

"It was not a hard task," smiled Mrs. Howland. "He found the portals of it ajar and crept in so gently and naturally, and is a wonderfully precious tenant. He will bide 'Till forever passes by.'"

There was a quick intaking of Snap's breath, and the little upraising of the head which Constance knew so well, but he did not speak. Then a commotion arose at the farther end of the piazza, and the next second Polly came tearing around the corner



at full tilt, Rhody hobbling upon his three legs after her.

"Hello, little craft! Where away?" sang out Snap, his tremendously deep voice ringing out as it might have rung on board ship.

"Oh, brother Snap, I've found out all about him, and I hurried back to tell you 'cause I thought you'd want to know right off quick."

"Did you think I'd grown tired of my new holding ground and was ready to weigh anchor, Captain?" asked Snap, reaching out to catch the little figure hurling herself upon him like a torpedo-boat under full headway.

"*One bell!* Slow down, Captain! Struck heavy weather? You seem to have carried away your foreskysail and mizzen top-gallant-brace," for the bow which had tied Polly's curly mop out of her eyes was flopping rakishly over one ear, and her belt had come undone and was hanging by the little straps of linen through which it had been slipped. Polly herself was hot, breathless, and dusty. She paid no attention whatever to Snap's words or her mother's and sisters' exclamations of dismay or inquiry. Snap laughed outright, but picking the



dishevelled young lady up bodily seated her upon his knees, saying:

“Let go anchor! Now what’s it all about?”

“Rhody! I’ve found out all about him. I ran down the hill——”

“What!” exclaimed Gail. “Polly, do you mean to tell us you’ve been way down to the village?”

“Of course! Why not? I had to run like the very devil——”

“Polly! My little girl! Baby!” were the scandalized exclamations of the feminine portion of Polly’s hearers. A smothered chuckle evinced the masculine portion’s sense of humor.

“Well, I did,” insisted Polly, with the expression of a seraph.

“But you need not use such language to impress that fact upon us,” remonstrated Constance. “What do you suppose Snap will think of you?”

“Why, that is exactly what *he* would have said. Sailors always say such things, don’t they, brother Snap?” was the wholly disconcerting retort, as Polly turned her great gray eyes upon him.

For one second Snap struggled manfully to conquer his risibles, then the dark hair



was buried in the auburn as Snap hugged Polly close, his whole body shaking with smothered laughter. Polly never turned a hair, but eyed her mother and sisters with a look which said as plainly as words could have done: "What did I tell you? He did n't *deny* it." At that moment Constance caught one black, mischievous eye peering at her from out Polly's tousled curls. Then Snap sat up and taking the bonny little face in both his hands said:

"Polly, you're dead right. I'd have said just that as sure as guns if I had n't said something a heap worse. We're a hard lot, I'm afraid, but, honey, I'd cut it out if I were you. He's a great old scapegoat, that same devil, and I dare say has to stand for a lot more than he deserves, but just the same he has n't the *entrée* into polite circles—your mother's and sisters' for instance—so let's not invite him. Maybe *I* shall some day when my wits get sort of wool-gathering, but I'd hate to think I'd set *you* the example. Now what about Rhody?"

"Why, you know I wanted to find out who owned him and everything, and whether I might keep him or not, and what *do* you think I found out? Ralph had just a little



time to spare after luncheon and he went with me to see the people he'd seen Rhody with,—they live way down in Brook Hollow,—and they said they were keeping Rhody for William Smith,—you know him, Mother, he belonged to one of the battle-ships; I don't know which one or what he was on it, do you, brother Snap?"

"Yes, because if it is the same William Smith who was down at Annapolis he was on the *Olympia* Second Class Cruiser as Chief Petty Officer, but was transferred to one of the battleships when the fleet started on the cruise last December. He had a month's leave before joining his ship at the Roads and came north somewhere."

"He came to Montgentian," broke in Polly. "We found that out too. He came to see Mrs. Pringle; she's his sister-in-law; his wife's dead; and when he came he brought Rhody with him; somebody at Annapolis gave Rhody to him. Did n't you ever *see* Rhody there?" Polly's tone was reproachful, as though any one who had once seen Rhody ought never to forget him.

"Not to my knowledge," smiled Snap. "But if you ever happen to visit Crabtown you will not be surprised at that, for I know of no place upon earth that has a larger



aggregation of dogs, all sorts and conditions of dogs, owned and at large, thoroughbred and mongrel—principally mongrel,—and continually in evidence and under foot, than that place has. There might have been a hundred Rhodys lost in the shuffle, and I dare say the ramifications of the Rhody family would prove truly amazing if we could trace them,” and Snap chuckled at his memory of the Annapolitan dogs; as motley a collection as one could stumble upon, running at large day and night, wrangling, fighting, disreputably dirty, mangy, deformed, some minus an eye or a leg, but as happy-go-lucky as the young ragamuffins to whom they attached themselves, and rampaged the town in the greatest good-fellowship. But Polly had no idea of classing Rhody with that category. So she entered her protest against Snap’s insinuation.

“Now, brother Snap, you know Rhody is n’t *that* kind of a dog at all. He is a *gentleman-dog*; can’t you see that?”

“Granted. What then?”

“Well, if he is, he must be treated like a gentleman-dog. Mr. Smith wanted dreadfully to take him along with him, but could n’t, ’cause it was such an awful long



cruise. The ships had to go way, way round South America, you know, and come up to California, where you are going to meet yours, Connie says."

"Fact. And by Jove, I've got a brain throb! Rhody means Rhode Island, of course. My ship, and I'll bet two cents to a collar button it's Smith's too. Great work! Suppose I take Rhody along with me, let him report for duty when I do, and make the great cruise?"

Snap got no further for at that point Polly promptly strangled him. From the moment Ralph had deposited Rhody and his mud upon her lap, Rhody had been signalled out from among ordinary dogs, and her busy little brain began formulating plans for his future. The first step had, of course, been to learn to whom he belonged, and whether his guardian *pro tem.* might lay her plans to become his guardian for all time. In her interview with Mrs. Pringle she had intuitively gathered that Rhody was a none too welcome addition to that lady's home circle. Indeed, she had seemed quite enthusiastic at the prospect of his joining any other home circle of proportions large enough to slip its rim over him and hold him; a task which she had found well-nigh



impossible, for it must be remembered that Rhody was an Annapolitan dog, and Annapolitan dogs, like Annapolitan *boys*, recognize no boundary lines; anybody else's grounds, back-yards, fields, or piazzas are just exactly as good as their own. Rhody was a sea-dog even if his voyagings thus far had been limited to trips to and from the *Olympia*, at anchor since Second Class Cruise just beyond the sea wall in the Severn River. William Smith had often kept the little dog on board with him, and Rhody had grown nearly frantic when on the trips to and fro the little steam launch had bobbed upon the waves threatening to pitch him overboard until he at length found his sea-legs. Naturally no one knew anything of these facts, and Rhody could not enlighten them. All he could do was to sit at Snap's feet during this conversation, and cock his head knowingly to one side when the words "Smith," "*Olympia*," or "on board" were used. Presently Snap became aware of the little beast's actions and said:

"Polly, look sharp! Rhody, where's *Smith*? On board the *Olympia*?"

I wonder how a human being would feel if, while possessing perfect hearing, but entirely deprived of speech, he were suddenly



asked a question which he would give more than anything in this world to answer, yet realized how powerless he was to do so? Poor little Rhody was in that situation hard and fast, but he strove bravely to make amends. Barking madly he spun around upon his three whole legs, then feeling this inadequate to express his ecstasy he rose upon his hind legs and let his fore legs hang as limply as possible; a brave attempt at "attention." Smith had taught him the trick.

The next second Polly tumbled heels over head from Snap's knees and was holding the little beast in her arms, as she cried:

"Oh, brother Snap! Brother Snap, will you take him to the *Rhode Island* with you? Will you?"

Snap rose gravely to his feet, as gravely came to attention before Constance, as gravely saluted, and said: "Sir, Captain Polly and I await orders."

"Quick, Connie! Quick!" was the Captain's very non-regulation interruption, and, alack! the "Admiral's" was not one whit better, for, with equal enthusiasm, she cried:

"Can you, Snap? Oh, please do if you can."

Snap laughed. "For a future Admiral's



wife you're no sort of use on discipline, Connie and Captain Polly—well, I've got to begin on Ralph, I see, and leave him to whip you both into shape or you'll disgrace the service—and *me*. But Rhody goes all the same. When I light out for the old ship he goes along with me—that's straight. Want to go to see Smith, Rhody? Well, all right, old boy, I'll take it for granted that you do, only don't try to impress it upon us with such an infernal din."



## CHAPTER VI

### IN HONOR OF THE COLORS

A FEW evenings after Snap's arrival he was lying at length beneath one of the spreading maples on the velvety lawn. Polly had squatted near him and Rhody was curled up in a little round ball close to his feet. Just at hand Mrs. Howland sat beside a small wicker tea-table from which a maid had shortly before removed the afternoon-tea service. Gail was sitting, *à la* Turk, at her mother's feet, and not far away from Snap sat Constance and her friend and neighbor, Carol Barber, of whom we have already heard. Carol had stopped *en route* from Annapolis to pay a visit at the home of Burton Howard near Philadelphia. That class ring worn upon the night of the June ball lacked nothing of the usual significance. But Carol does not figure as conspicuously in this story as in an earlier one.

The long shadows from the setting sun



lay in deep green patches upon the vivid emerald of the lawn; overhead robins were singing their evening song; from the pine-wood back of the house the wind wafted balsamic odors to the group upon the lawn. Peace and the tranquillity of eventide lay over the land. Mrs. Howland, with hands folded in her lap, sat the personification of serenity. Gail was busily employed with some fancy work. Carol and Constance were bending over the former's latest acquisition to her kodak album, for Carol's kodak was the delight of her life. Polly was examining, with absorbing interest, an inscription upon a beautifully-polished silver bugle. Snap had brought it forth from among his belongings that afternoon and told Polly its pretty story. It was a Spanish bugle and had belonged to a bugler on the ill-fated *Cristobal Colon* when she met her fate in Santiago Bay. The bugler, a mere lad of seventeen, had been rescued and brought to the States a prisoner, where he died not long after from his injuries. Shortly before he died, he gave his beloved bugle to a young American Blue Jacket, then on duty in the Naval Hospital, and for years the beautiful instrument remained in the Jackie's possession. During the pre-



vious summer, when Snap was making his First Class Cruise, the Blue Jacket, then a man of thirty or more, had become a petty officer on board the *Olympia*, and upon a certain occasion Snap had been able to do him a good turn. Snap had not attached any importance to the act, but John Wheelan *had*, and when ordered to the Far East asked Snap to accept as a slight testimony of his gratitude the little Spanish lad's bugle. Thinking to please Polly, Snap had unearthed it and given it to her, and Polly was intensely interested in the story. The inscription so beautifully engraved upon the bugle ran:

“Grandes hazañas, entiende  
Que nunca bien les emprende  
El que los peligros mira.”

“The noblest deeds are never wrought  
By him who anxiously takes thought  
Of all the dangers run.”

Snap had translated it for her, and she now sat pouring over it, her lively imagination drawing all sorts of vivid pictures. Presently she raised her eyes and looked steadily at Snap. He seemed to be asleep. His arms, clasped beneath his head, rested



upon a grass cushion. How handsome he was, thought Polly, as she looked at the strong, dark face, with the masterful yet sensitive mouth, firm clean-shaven chin, then to the big, vigorous body glowing with youth and health. Snap's pose was unconsciously perfect and displayed every line of his figure—the heroic figure of perfect physical manhood.

Polly's chin dropped into her cupped hands as her deep gray eyes rested upon this brother-to-be. How dear he had grown to her in those few days; how she longed to win his approbation; to be worthy to be called his Little Captain. Was he really asleep now? They had been out on the lawn since about four o'clock, and after tea was served Snap flung himself at length upon the velvety lawn, saying: "At this season of the year I like to get close to old Mother Earth; to just naturally roll on the grass and smell it." Mrs. Howland replied:

"Roll all you want to, son, but green grass is not the best sort of couch for white flannels. Put this grass pillow beneath your arms, that will save your sleeves anyway."

"That's like *you*, Carissima," Snap answered, as he tucked it under his arms and



let his head fall back upon them. The next moment he seemed to have fallen asleep, and had not stirred since. How softly he breathed; how regularly the great chest rose and fell beneath its negligé shirt, from which the white flannel sack coat had fallen back. *Was* he really asleep? Again the question flashed through Polly's mind, and, as she looked, Snap raised his eyelids and smiled at her asking quizzically:

"Was I asleep, Captain?"

"That's what I can't make out for certain. You looked so, but I don't see how any one could drop asleep as suddenly as all that. Were you really?"

"You don't know what a Midshipman can do in the way of dropping off, Captain. I've seen men drop down on the deck after a long watch, or target practice, and be sound asleep before you could get twenty feet away from them."

"What, right on the hard deck?" cried Polly, incredulously.

"Right on the hard deck," repeated Snap. "So why should n't I have been sound asleep just now on *this* downy bed?" he concluded, patting the soft turf near him.

"Still I don't believe you really were," was Polly's skeptical reply.



“Well, I was n’t. I was watching you most of the time.”

“How could you, when your eyes were shut?” demanded Polly.

“Are you sure they were shut?” smiled Snap.

Polly bent forward in order to bring her face nearer his. “Shut your eyes that way again,” she commanded. Snap complied, and his wonderful fringe of long, heavy lashes rested almost upon his cheeks. But Polly was too close to be deceived this time; she detected the faint flash of the eyes beneath and instantly pounced upon Snap. Ever so daintily her fingers laid hold of those long lashes and lifted the eyelids, she and Snap breaking into a laugh which caused the others to glance toward them, and Mrs. Howland to ask in a tone of mild expostulation.

“Why, Polly, what in this world are you trying to do?”

“He is trying to fool me and I’ve caught him.”

“Yes, exposed all my little cherished subterfuges; shown me up in my true colors,” laughed Snap, then, as though the word “colors” had recalled something to him, he added quickly: “But let me tell you, Cap-



tain, what I was thinking about as I lay there spying upon you. Come close; I can talk snugger when you are near me; yes, just that way, so my arm can encircle you," as Polly gave a little bounce which landed her against Snap, who had turned slightly upon his left side thus leaving his right arm free to slip around her as her back rested against him.

"Look over there, Captain. The sun will soon sink behind the mountains. If I were back yonder in Annapolis now 'warning call' for Colors would be sounding, and when the sun sets the old flag would be lowered to color call. It's a great old call, Polly. I love it, and for four years I've hardly missed hearing it. Somehow the day seems incomplete for me unless I do, and can salute Old Glory as she runs down the staff. You know I didn't often go on leave as the other men did; at first home was too far away, and then I didn't have any to go to, honey." Snap's arm tightened slightly about the little figure and Polly bent forward to kiss him as she whispered: "But you have one *now*, brother Snap."

"It has n't taken me three whole days to find *that* out, Captain," Snap answered softly. Then added in his usual tone:



"But I'd like to hear Colors at sunset just the same."

"*Why can't we?*" asked Polly, eagerly. "We've got the bugle. Don't *you* know how to—to—what do you call it? sound them? blow them? play them?"

"Sound them," said Snap. "Why, yes, I know the call."

"Oh, will you sound it now when the sun sets?" cried Polly, eagerly, her face radiant.

"But we have no Colors to lower," demurred Snap.

"Never mind, I want to hear the call. Oh, please do, brother Snap."

"Then we'd better get busy mighty quick," said Snap, something of Polly's enthusiasm infecting him. "Hop up, little Captain, old Sol's getting out of sight mighty fast. We are too late for warning call, but I'll order the others to attention. Beg pardon, Admiral, for interrupting, but we're about to sound Colors," he called to Constance.

"Oh, how pretty!" she cried, rising hastily to her feet, the others all doing likewise, although they looked a little bewildered and Gail asked: "What must we do?"

"Watch the Admiral," answered Snap.



As there was no flag to face, Constance turned toward the setting sun, brought her heels together, let her arms fall to her sides, and raised her face toward the West where dear Mother Nature had painted in gorgeous coloring her own picture of Old Glory. A rich crimson sunset with soft white, gilt-edged clouds just above, and higher up a blue so clear and deep that it was almost dazzling in its vividness. Snap stepped in front of the little group, each member of which had instantly and seriously followed Constance's example, and bringing his heels together at attention, raised his head and threw the bugle to his lips. His chest swelled, and the clear, sweet, silvery notes of the bugle floated out upon the tranquil evening air. It was a fine instrument, with a singularly haunting quality in its song, and Snap, who loved this call, blew it with exquisite sympathy. The long, thrilling notes floated up to the mountain, were caught in some of its rocky clefts, held caressingly for a moment, and then flung back in an echo which floated far out over Lake Caprice to die away in ever-fainting notes. It was a wonderfully impressive scene, and Mrs. Howland's handkerchief stole furtively to her eyes as she stood just



behind the others. Constance's eyes never for a moment left the face of this man whom she so loved and honored, and who in such a very little while must be divided from her by the breadth of the world. Carol's thoughts rushed back to the last time she had heard that call in Annapolis. Gail's were all of conjecture as to whether she would ever hear it down there. Polly's face was transfigured by it, and for the first time the thrill of pure patriotism caused a little creeping shiver to run down her spine and into her soul flashed the true meaning of the flag which Snap had sworn to serve.

But there was one other individual upon whom this bugle call made an impression which shaped all his future life. Just as Snap blew the first sweet notes, Ralph turned into the gate. The group upon the lawn was facing the opposite direction and was unaware of his arrival. Intuitively Ralph halted and stood at attention some distance from them.

As the last note died away, Snap lowered his bugle and turned toward those standing behind him. His face wore an expression which only Constance fully comprehended. In turning he caught sight of Ralph and saluted. The boy gave an answering salute



and then rushed pell-mell toward him crying eagerly:

“ Oh, Mr. Hunter, what is it? What does it mean? It’s just splendid! I did just like the others were doing and it—it—why it made me all creepy up and down my spine bone. Honest it did—I can feel it yet. Do they play that music down in Annapolis? Gee, but I want to go there! Do you know all about it, Polly?”

For a moment Snap’s lips parted in a smile which displayed his faultless teeth, for Ralph’s manner and words held all a boy’s keen enthusiasm. Then growing serious, he said:

“ Will you two sit here beside me and listen to something I want to tell you?”

“ You bet! Course we will!” was the prompt reply in duet.

Snap dropped down upon the grass once more, this time with his back against the tree. Ralph squatted before him, his face eager for what would follow; Polly again snuggled beside him.

“ I’m not much on lectures, and I’ve always hated and kicked against them like the dickens when I thought some one was trying to hand me out a moral speil, but since I’ve got away from down yonder I’ve be-



gun to wake up to what it was all about; something more than a daily routine interspersed with a blowing up and hitting the pap——”

“*What is that*” asked Ralph, and not without reason. Snap laughed.

“Naval Academy slang for getting ragged; being put on the report for doing something we’d no business to do; a cussing out. I’ve only been away from there a week, but sometimes it seems like a year, and upon my word there have been moments when I’ve wished I could begin it all over again; could hear reveille each morning, mess-call, colors, and taps. We used to kick against taps like blazes sometimes, but well—they are all wonderful every one of them, and they are sounding each hour of the whole twenty-four in *some* part of the world, do you realize that? There is n’t an hour on this big globe which does n’t witness the sun either rising or setting; not a place in it where reveille is not waking up men in the service, or taps somewhere singing softly: “Go-to-sleep, Go-to-sleep.” Maybe it is just turning in, or perhaps it is the long, long sleep, but taps is always the bedtime song, and if it is not sounding here it surely is somewhere else. Wherever Old Glory is



waving, a bugle is sounding some call. It is the sunset call—Colors—here, but on the other side of the world it is reveille; somewhere else it is the hour for taps; somewhere else mess-call. You never thought about that, did you? Well neither did I till lately, but I've been doing a heap of thinking within a few days, and I want to set Ralph thinking too before I leave here. Just hard enough to make him want to hump himself lively for those entrance exams about two years from now, and to realize when he passes them——”

“If I do?” interrupted Ralph.

“Now, see here!” exclaimed Snap, suddenly sitting up, and into his eyes sprang a flash of light which caused Ralph to instinctively draw back, and gather an inkling of another side of the nature of the man speaking to him. It passed in a moment, and Ralph half wondered if it had really ever been there, so quickly did the old frank smile return. Nevertheless, Snap had noticed his start, and felt it to be rather wholesome than otherwise.

“Son, you want to cut all *that* out. You'll *enter*. Do you understand? And if you don't *Polly* is going to, if I have to cut off her curls and pass her off as my



brother. Hard job when it comes to a family resemblance, maybe, but—well—take your choice. If *you* fail us——”

Snap left his sentence unfinished.

“If he fails, I’ll never speak another word to him as long as I live and breathe,” was Polly’s ultimatum.

“I’m not going to fail, only I don’t see any use of being too cock-sure. *I’m* no such wonder that I can do more than a lot of other fellows.”

“Maybe you ain’t, but I guess you can do as *much*, and if you can’t,—well I don’t want you for my friend, and I won’t have you, so there now. But go on, please, brother Snap. Tell us some more about the flag.”

“There is n’t much more to tell, honey, only I do wish we had one here, and I’d teach you and Ralph the calls, and we would raise the old flag each morning and lower it at sunset, though I don’t see what we’d raise it on unless we rigged a tackle to the chimney, and that would be a far cry from a flag-staff, would n’t it?”

At this juncture Polly scrambled to her feet and rushed to her mother. Flinging her arms about her, she cried:

“Munsey, Munsey, may we have one?”



May we, so brother Snap can teach us the calls?"

Before Mrs. Howland could reply, Snap interrupted.

"Polly, you've got the brains of the whole bunch and I'm just a wooden figure-head. Carissima, may I have two square feet of ground on your property? Back yonder on the terrace if you don't mind?"

"Unto the half of my kingdom, son," answered Mrs. Howland.

"Oh, what are you going to do?" cried Polly.

"Tell you to-morrow. Got to have a little private pow-wow with Carissima first."

"Ah, tell us now—do!" begged Ralph, both he and Polly swarming upon Snap. He looked at them as though he found it hard to resist their appeal, but at that moment a maid approached to announce dinner and he said:

"Can't now anyway. No, you've both got to wait until to-morrow."

"Will you dine with us, Ralph?" asked Mrs. Howland hospitably.

"I'm afraid mother won't know where I am and will wait for me," demurred Ralph. "I told her I was off duty from four this afternoon and wanted to come up here,



but she expects me home for supper I know." The eager note in his voice settled the question.

"We'll phone down to her. Then directly after dinner Snap and I will have a few minutes' private talk."

"And we'll know to-night! We'll know to-night!" screamed Polly, dancing up and down in her eagerness.



## CHAPTER VII

### LAYING PLANS

THAT closeted talk with Mrs. Howland was a brief one. In a few words Snap explained his wish, and it is needless to add that it met with her instant approval. Yes, more than mere approval, her enthusiastic support, for in it she saw a rare opportunity to aid and encourage Ralph and inspire in Polly all the enthusiasm for her country and its flag which she felt to be a part of every girl's or woman's duty to them. As she and Snap came from the library, Snap's arm laid caressingly across her shoulder, they saw Polly and Ralph squatting upon the stairs, their ears alert for the first creak of the opening door. Before they could cross the threshold both the boy and girl were upon them. Snap reached out his free arm and laying hold of Ralph's coat-collar lifted him straight up, saying: "You've got to grow *so-o-o big*."

"Gee, but you're strong!" cried Ralph.



“When I get back next February I want you to weigh more than you do now, and it won’t be so easy for me to lift you. But come on outdoors; I’ll tell you both the secret now.”

“Oh, quick, quick, quick! I *can’t* wait any longer!” cried Polly.

A moment later they were on the piazza.

“Carissima has given me a place up yonder on the terrace, and we are to set up a genuine flag-staff, lower-mast, top-mast, with top at the doubling of the masts, and all, just like the flag-staff down at Annapolis, only not so big, of course. It is to be my little souvenir and we are to have a fine flag, a real genuine one; I’ll write for it to-night. Then we will have some lessons in bugle calls. Run and get the bugle, Polly, and we’ll begin right now; Ralph first, because he will have to hike for home pretty quick.”

For the next half hour there were some weird sounds proceeding from the Howlands’ piazza, for blowing a bugle is an art to be acquired by practice only, and often long practice too. Ralph filled his lungs and puffed manfully, but his most heroic efforts resulted only in wails which suggested a soul in torment. Somehow Polly



caught the knack a little easier and *her* efforts were rewarded by a few musical, if feeble notes.

“Now don’t you two get discouraged at your first try, for you’ll catch on sooner than you think, and I’ll bet my shoe that by the time I hit my ship you and Polly will both be able to give a fairly good rendering.”

And sure enough, Snap’s words were prophetic. In the course of the next week the flag-staff was ready to be placed in position, the flag had arrived from the city, and a day was set for raising the staff and running up Old Glory. It was a red-letter day in Polly’s life, for Snap, to please her and Ralph, brought forth his full-dress uniform and donned it for the occasion, feeling more foolish than any one guessed, for he hated display of any kind and had all a man’s aversion to making what he considered an exhibition of himself.

Several of Polly’s friends were invited and four o’clock was the hour named for the ceremony. It was far prettier than Snap guessed and destined to be more far-reaching in its influence than he dreamed. With all his inborn power to command, and his four-years’ training he gave his orders





FROM THAT HOUR RALPH AND POLLY WERE CUSTODIANS OF  
THE FLAG







in clear, sharp, decisive tones which the men instantly obeyed with a promptitude that surprised even themselves, and in no time the flag-staff was in place. Then came the raising of the colors. Snap wanted Ralph or Polly to sound the call, but neither yet felt sufficiently skilful or sure of the tricks the bugle might play. So Snap, handsome, masterful, splendidly set up, blew the beautiful call, as Ralph and Polly ran the flag hand-over-hand to the truck. Then all joined in singing "The Star-Spangled Banner" as the beautiful Stars and Stripes floated out over their heads, the emblem of the country they loved, and that Snap was sworn to serve. From that hour Ralph and Polly were custodians of the flag, and faithful little ones they proved.

True, Ralph could not always be on hand for reveille, but Polly could and was, and under Snap's instruction soon became a remarkable little bugler. Ralph's duties at the W. U. T. office made it harder for him to get time to learn, or to be on hand, but, thanks to Snap, Ralph's hours were shortened and he never failed to appear for "Colors," which were now sounded at six o'clock. True, the sun did not really set until after seven, but "the official hour"



was *six*, so said the Admiral, and the Admiral's word stood.

Another link which bound Snap closer to the children, and added to their patriotism was a happy thought which popped into his head the very night he wrote for the flag, and the following morning he acted upon it with his usual promptness. He took Ralph and Polly to a tailor in town and had them carefully measured, giving the man the most minute instructions and selecting the materials himself. As the outcome of those measurements, there arrived the day before the flag raising a mysterious box. When it was opened in their presence it was found to contain two wonderful suits for each. Polly's was a navy-blue serge and a white linen duck, sailor suit, or perhaps a midshipman's suit would be more correct, for it was as near the midshipman's service and working suits as a girl's garment could be made, and pretty enough she looked in either the "white works," or "blue service." And it will be well to state right here that Polly Howland's suits were *not* on the order of those commonly sold in the shops as "midshipman's jumper suits." Not by any means! What the average public does *not* know about midshipman's uniforms,



and, indeed, midshipmen in general, would fill a good fat volume, and I'd like to add, incidentally, that this ignorance concerning our service is a disgrace to the country. In no other on the face of the globe is there so little knowledge of the branches of the Service and everything pertaining to it displayed, or such utter indifference, and it is an insult to the flag which protects us. Polly's blue service was the regulation navy-blue serge, the skirt a kilt, the jacket cut on the straight up and down lines of the midshipman's service blouse with its standing braid collar with anchors at either side. As Polly was supposed to be in command for the time being, Snap had insisted upon the "Three Stripes," three gold bands, and star upon the sleeves. In the Academy this is the insignia of the rank of a Cadet Lieutenant, one of the twelve commanders of the companies. So Snap decided that Polly, as commander of this little company, was entitled to wear them. Ralph's suit was exactly the same, with the exception of the stripes upon his sleeve; his boasted but two. Ralph was the Junior Lieutenant.

The white "working suits" were of heavy duck, and did *not* have the blue collars as those sold in the shops have. The ordinary



civilian has yet to learn that jumpers with *blue* collars are worn by the jackies *only*, and that a midshipman, or, in other words, the young officer who is still an undergraduate at the Academy, wears a pure white jumper with a black silk neckerchief knotted about his neck.

Ralph and Polly were thrown into a rapture bordering upon delirium when those suits were tried on, and it was well they arrived late one Saturday afternoon or the W. U. T. service might have suffered the loss of a messenger boy. They were first publicly aired at the raising of colors, and a bonny little pair the girl and boy were in the regulation "blues." The curiosity they excited and the questions which they elicited bid fair to banish from Montgentian, at least, some of the fog of ignorance which enveloped it regarding this particular branch of the Service, and Polly secretly confided to Ralph that she had made up her mind to be "put wise" regarding a few points before brother Snap left Montgentian.

"Why, do you know, Ralph Wilbur, that we just don't know *anything*?" she demanded with considerable spirit.

"Sure thing. We're just green——"



“Wooden,” instantly corrected Polly.  
“That is what Snap would say.”

“Well, ‘wooden,’ then. I mean to find out some things too, for when I go in—enter,” he promptly corrected,—  
“I don’t mean to be quite a fool if I can help it. Gee, but this is a big day, is n’t it?”

“Biggest ever,” assented Polly, and the next moment refreshments were being served as the merry party sat upon the lawn with the flag floating overhead.

Those three June weeks were the shortest Snap had ever known, as well as the happiest. To Polly they were one continuous high-day and holiday, for having once crept into Snap’s heart she stayed there and each day she nestled closer. In this home Snap found all the rounding out of a rather lonely life.

A few days after the decision regarding Rhody, Snap, escorted by Constance and Polly, had called upon Mrs. Wilbur, and the result of that call changed the whole course of Ralph’s life.

Other calls followed, and before the day of Snap’s departure arrived it was fully decided that Ralph should enter the United States Navy at seventeen, if the combined



efforts of Snap's advice and influence, Mrs. Wilbur's co-operation and guidance, and Ralph's wits and weight when the time arrived to take his entrance examination, could compass that end.

The day before he left Montgentian, Snap said to Polly:

"Captain, will you come for a little stroll with me? I've one or two things on my mind I'd like to shift to yours. Maybe you'll call it a mean trick, though I hardly think so because you're game. Constance has gone down to do the marketing and will be away a full hour. When she comes back I want *her*, honey, and nobody else. Do you understand?"

Polly nodded, and slipped her arms about him as he sat upon the piazza after breakfast. The other members of the family were engaged with their various household duties. She was never far from this big "brother" if she could contrive to be near him, and his response was warm. Now she leaned her curly crown against his dark one, but did not speak. Somehow she could n't. The parting was too near, and whenever she thought of the morrow and the days which would follow for eight long, long months without a glimpse of the one whom she had



learned to love so dearly, her throat filled and she had to wink hard.

"Shall we start right now, Captain?" asked Snap, pressing the soft face even closer to his.

"Yes," was all Polly could answer, and Snap rose to his feet, giving a quick, pitying glance at the little figure his uprising had disturbed, but saying nothing. His throat quivered strangely too, and there was a curious burning back of his eyes.

They struck into a pretty wood path which led from the rear of the house. Such a rare June day as it was! A mad melody of song welcomed them to the cool, delicious woods. About half a mile up the hill Snap paused in a grove of white pine trees which whispered mysteriously, and through which a wonderful woodland vista opened, revealing the valley below.

A forest patriarch which had long since succumbed to its venerable age lay upon the ground, and, seating himself upon it, he drew Polly to his side.

"Let's have this picture for our memory one, honey," he said. "I used to know something about 'memory pictures' and 'the one of a dim old forest.' This might



be the very place, don't you think so? I'll like to think about it anyway when I'm out there at the back of beyond and nothing but leagues and leagues of water all around me. I'll have a good many memory pictures, Polly, but there won't be any dearer than those of the little girl who first welcomed me here and promised to stand by me if necessary. I shall often think of my little Captain. Write to me, Polly, and tell me——"

But Snap got no farther, for at that instant Polly flung herself into his arms sobbing as though her heart would break. For a moment Snap was astonished. He had not suspected the intensity of Polly's love for him, or how entirely she had claimed him as one of her home circle. Then drawing her upon his knees and into his encircling embrace he said:

"My little Captain! My little Captain, is brother Snap so dear to you as this? Don't sob so bitterly, honey, for the eight months will pass more quickly than you believe."

But Snap's own voice quivered slightly and his eyes were dimmed. He was strangely stirred by the affection given him so freely by this little girl and the family



to which he had been only a name three weeks before.

“Eight—eight months are almost a year,” was the stifled reply from his shoulder where Polly’s head was hidden.

For a moment Snap was silent as he took a rapid survey of the past years and realized how interminable eight months had once seemed to him. Would they ever seem so long again? Were those to which he was looking forward likely to seem longer than any he had ever yet known? He had often felt misgivings regarding them of late, especially during these three weeks of ideal home life. But he must remember that duty stood paramount to all else. Otherwise of what avail the past four years of discipline and training to fit him for the Service? What sort of an example would he set for Ralph and—yes, for Polly, if he failed to meet its first demand upon him? Drawing his handkerchief from his pocket, he said very gently:

“Little Captain, raise your head? There,” as Polly looked up at him through her swimming eyes, “let me wipe away all those tears. They are more precious to me than you can guess, honey, because they prove, as nothing else could, how much you love and



will miss me, but we must not give way to them now. We may not have another hour like this in which to be together, and I want to talk to you while we can talk alone, because I have a great trust to impose in you, Captain."

"In me?" interjected Polly.

"Yes, in you, Captain. I've been doing a lot of thinking and observing since I've been here, and I've come to some conclusions it would be pretty hard to shake. Will you listen to a few of them?"

"Every single one!" exclaimed Polly eagerly.

"Good! Well, here are a few of them: Carissima down yonder is a tiny little mother, is n't she? Neither big nor strong enough to buck up against some of the hard things of this world. Constance is worth a dozen of most girls and will be equal to a dozen in most cases. Gail is just like breeze and sunshine, but Gail is too young to take things in hand yet; she must finish school and do a heap of things girls of her age have to do. You, Captain, are only twelve years old, I know, but if I'm not very much mistaken you've got grit and will enough to carry you plumb to the finish if you set out to do a thing." Polly glowed



with pride, but Snap did not seem aware of the impression his words were making. "Yes," he continued, "you're all to the good, little Captain, and that's exactly the reason I asked you to come up here. If I could do just as I have a *mind* to, I'd stop right here and look out for you all, because that is what a man is *made* for, but a man in the Service has got to go wherever he is ordered and do exactly what he is told to do, and if he can't do it with a good grace he'd better 'pack his little grip and fade away' mighty quick. To-morrow, Pollykins, will be one of the hardest days I'll ever live through,—no need to deny that,—but I've got to live through it and do it like a man. I want you all to be proud, not ashamed of me. But I want *you*, honey, to help me—yes, I mean that, because you can, more than you guess. In the first place, I want you to look after Carissima; to make that your very first duty. Try to think of the things I'd do if I were here——"

"I know! I know!" broke in Polly. "You always get up when she comes into the room, and you always have a chair ready for her, and you see that she is n't in a draught, and you pick up her handkerchief



if she lets it fall, and you hand her her cup of tea, and if she goes down the porch steps you always take her arm, and you have a sofa pillow ready to put back of her chair, and—and—your eyes look love into her eyes whenever you speak to her, and——”

“Honey! Honey! Stop! Those little acts are just nothing, they——”

“Mother says they are just everything, and she knows,” persisted Polly. “She said the other night that she wondered what she was that this great gift and joy should be hers, and mother never says such things unless she feels them. She loves you, brother Snap.”

“Thank God she does,” breathed Snap, softly. “But what I mean would be very different things from those you have named. I mean that she will be worried sometimes and she is not very strong, then you can help her by not bothering her about little things. Sort of dope them out for yourself, you know. And I want you to write me about her sometimes. I’ll be glad of your view-point of things here. Then there is another thing you can do for me. I’m mighty interested in Ralph, and I want to see him make good. Mrs. Wilbur told me you are giving him a run for his money in



school, that you are only two years behind him and in a fair way to overhaul him if he does n't keep his eye piped. Now, Ralph's all right, Captain, and he is going to make a man some day, only he has been handicapped. Since his father's death he has had to hustle too hard, and so has his mother, and neither is built on the hustling plan. His mother has got will enough, but will, unfortunately, does n't supply physical backbone, although it may supply moral. Ralph has wits and will, but he's such a little spindly shaver that he can't keep up the pressure necessary. If he gets played out and discouraged the jig will be up, and there's only one person who is going to help him in such a crisis."

"Who's that?" asked Polly eagerly.

"Can't you guess?"

"Do you mean Mr. Stone?" asked Polly, naming the principal of the High School. Snap had called upon him and put before him his plans for Ralph.

"No, I mean *you*."

"Me!" cried Polly, incredulously. "Why, I can't do a *thing* with Ralph."

"You can do a heap more than you guess, little sister. Listen here. Ralph is your good chum and crony. You've grown up



together from little children, and he thinks a lot of you and admires you. Now you know as well as I do that we want to be like the people we admire, and so it naturally follows that Ralph wishes to be like you——”

“But I ’m only a girl,” was Polly’s rather uncomplimentary insinuation for her sex.

“Connie is only a girl, but she can do a few things with me, Polly, that no one else on earth can.”

Polly looked off through the green vista. Here, indeed, was subject for thought: a new phase in the relation of Snap and Constance had been presented to her, and her clear little brain absorbed it instantly. Turning to Snap, she said earnestly:

“Tell me what to do and I ’ll do it.”

“It is hard to tell that, Pollykins. Circumstances must decide, but I believe you ’ll prove the best possible pilot for Ralph during the coming two years. He will be fifteen in September; you will be thirteen in August. If all goes well he ought to graduate from High School before he is seventeen, and then come prep work and entrance exams. He ought to enter the Academy in September of that year. But a heap of hard work lies ahead, and he must



understand that. By-the-way, you have competitive exams here unless I'm much mistaken. There's Ralph's chance! He could enter on that. Fire his ambition, Polly, spur him on! Who knows but you may be the making of the finest admiral the old flag ever waved over. Big undertaking and serious responsibility, but Old Glory is worthy of our best, God bless it!" and involuntarily Snap brought his hand to salute. Polly's eyes sparkled.

"I'll do it! I'll do everything in this world I can to help! Ralph and I'll work like a house-a-fire, and we'll enter the Service! You see if we don't!"

"I don't doubt it. He literally, you figuratively, but not the less actually. But now we must go back, for the hour is ended," concluded Snap, glancing at his watch. "Come little sister, my little Captain, I think we understand each other," and Snap rose to his feet. Polly did likewise, but just as they were about to start she flung her arms about him, crying, with a sob in her voice:

"Oh, if only you did n't have to go! If you only did n't! Japan and India are so far off! It seems as if I'd only just got you to let you go!"



“I may go out of your sight, dear, but never out of your mind, any more than you and all who have grown so dear to me will go out of mine. Be brave, little Captain, and the time will pass quicker than you dream it can.”

It was a very tender caress that Snap gave the little girl, and then hand in hand they went down the hill.

Twenty-four hours later he had left them, and what that leave-taking meant can only be grasped by those whose lives are spent in the Service, where those dearest to us are with us to-day and divided by hundreds of miles on the morrow. To the one who sails away to new scenes and new experiences there is very little time left in which to dwell upon the parting. Thought, mind, and energies must be given to the duty of the hour. Only in the long silent watches, or the hours off duty, does he find time to think. It is for those left behind to realize what the long separations mean, and the bitterness and the tragedy of some of them will forever remain unknown.



## CHAPTER VIII

### WHEN OCTOBER CAME

THOSE three months were long ones for Constance and Polly. To the former they were filled with a sense of loneliness the world little guessed, for Constance was not the type of girl who wore her heart upon her sleeve, but her love for Snap lay far deeper than any one realized, unless it was little Polly. Polly had always been "Constance's girl" in the family, and for some of the strange reasons which often govern family relations, Polly and Constance were closer to each other than Gail and Constance had ever been, notwithstanding the difference in their ages. As Snap had said, "Nine years are not so very many if you say them quickly," so perhaps eight may be reckoned in the same manner. At all events, it was Polly who had crept closest into Snap's heart during his three weeks' visit in his home; Polly who, next to Constance, he loved to have with him, and many a happy stroll and chummy little pow-wow



had the man and little girl enjoyed together. And Polly had shown herself wonderfully tactful. Never had she intruded when she felt the time or the hour to be wholly Snap's and Constance's; never had she forced her presence upon Snap if she instinctively felt that the man was fighting the fierce battle of self-control against the coming separation, for it was harder for Snap than any one but Constance and Polly dreamed. Perhaps this was the reason Polly was the one to carry a dainty little luncheon up to Constance the day Snap left them. They bade him good-bye indoors and then followed him out upon the piazza. Constance, brave and smiling, bade him God-speed as he held her in his arms. When the carriage which bore him away turned into the road, and was hidden from sight by the vines upon the porch, she turned to find her mother's arms awaiting her. For one moment she rested in them and then said:

"Let me go to my room, dear, for I must fight it out alone. It is the first, but it will not be the last time, you know, and they will all be so hard, and you will not always be near me. Forgive me if I seem selfish, but I can't stay with you all now."



"My little girl! My little girl!" said Mrs. Howland, as she released her, and Constance hurried away to her room. What took place there in the ensuing three hours only the Great Eye witnessed, the Great Heart ever knew. Such hours are not to be lightly looked upon. But "a little child shall lead them," we are told; how, or by what means we of human limitations may not understand, but the lesson is never lacking. If during those three hours little Polly nearly sobbed her heart out up in the white pine wood, her arms upon the log where Snap had sat, her face buried in them, she never told any one, not even Constance, but when twelve o'clock drew nigh, she gathered her little self together, wiped her eyes, and sat up, looking off through the beautiful woodland vista, but seeing nothing of it, so filled were her thoughts by Snap and their talk the precious afternoon. Perhaps fifteen minutes passed, then she began a little monologue heard only by the hermit-thrushes and the gray squirrels watching her from the boughs overhead.

"Yes, it was every word true, and I've *got* to dope it out for myself. Mother feels terribly, terribly, for she loves brother Snap dearly. Gail likes him too, but not



the same way, and Connie's heart is almost broken. I never knew her feel like this in all my life. And *I*—oh, I *don't* want to wait eight whole months, I don't, I don't! Brother Snap I want you to-day, to-morrow, and every day. I want you right now this very minute, for I love you so, I do, I do!" and once more the little head fell upon the log. Then Polly began to reproach herself: "Polly Howland, get up and go home this minute! Captain Polly! A pretty Captain *you* are and the Admiral in distress! Go home and do something for her!" and with this self-invective Polly sprang to her feet, hastily dried her tears and set off down the hill at a pace which defied any possibility of a lapse from her self-imposed duty. Half an hour later she was serving Constance's luncheon, for, brave as the girl had been, nature demanded and received the heart-tribute which all who live and feel most deeply must pay. Constance never forgot that little act of devotion, and the first letter which Snap received told him the pretty story of Polly's love and forgetfulness of self; of her loyalty to him and her pride in living up to the name he had given her.

July, August, and September slipped by,



and when October 1st came, Polly, now thirteen years old, had entered high school. Ralph had entered two years before, for, if slight and physically undeveloped, Ralph's mind was keen and he could do good work. It had secretly been a source of mortification to Polly that she could not enter high school when Ralph did, but two years' difference in age mean a good deal at eleven and thirteen. Ralph was just a little past thirteen when he entered, and Polly had fully made up her mind to be not one single day older when *she* entered. She had said very little about it, but, working steadily, had, as Snap expressed it, given Ralph a good run for his money. This year Ralph, it is true, would be a Junior, and Polly a little Freshman, but from time immemorial Juniors and Freshmen have fraternized more freely than Sophomores and Freshmen, between whom there seems to exist a traditional feud. If Ralph was a little inclined to be patronizing, he right speedily had "a fall taken out of him," to use a bit of school slang, for very shortly after Polly's entrance an incident transpired which brought to pass a radically new order of things. That Polly should be the one elected by fate to readjust matters and



infuse into high-school life a healthier condition of things, Polly herself would have been the very last one to believe it possible. Yet such was the case, and Captain Polly fell naturally and simply into the command.

Montgentian High School had not been in existence very long. Indeed, the building had been completed within the past five years, and, so far as the building was concerned, was a most model, up-to-date affair in every way. It was the only high school within a radius of five miles, for none of the adjacent towns, or perhaps I should say outlying districts of Montgentian, boasted a high school at all, and as a result the grammar-school pupils from all directions flocked into Montgentian.

Polly had, of course, attended the Montgentian grammar school, and when she graduated in June many of her friends had graduated with her and now entered the high. Polly had always been very popular in grammar school, and this popularity followed her into the high school. Consequently, a few days after entering and as she was walking home one afternoon with a group of her friends, boys and girls among them, Ralph in the group, for Ralph, even though a Junior, was still very loyal to Polly



and did not permit class "rates" to influence his attitude toward her, a girl from the Junior class came hurrying after them calling:

"Oh, Miss Howland! Miss Howland, wait just a minute, do! I want to speak to you about something so important."

For a moment Polly paid no attention to the hail, for she had never yet been called "Miss Howland," and somehow had unconsciously accepted her mother's idea that Constance, her eldest sister, was the only "Miss" Howland in the family, and that the younger sisters would have no legitimate claim to that title until Constance married; an old-fashioned notion, perhaps, but rather a wholesome one after all. So it required a second hail before she turned in response and asked:

"Oh, are you calling me, Agnes?" quite oblivious of a slight frown upon that young lady's face at the rather familiar "Agnes." Yet why not Agnes? Polly had known her all her life, and, until this high-school dignity enveloped her, Agnes had romped and played with Polly and been the best of chums.

"Why, of course, who else did you think, little silly?"



The gray eyes narrowed slightly. A bad beginning had been made. Then Polly replied quite imperturbably:

“Why, Connie, or Gail, of course. I’m a far cry from *Miss Howland* yet, don’t you know that?”

“You are *Miss Howland* from the very moment you enter high school, my dear child; don’t forget *that* important fact,—just as *I* am *Miss Simpson*.”

“You are welcome to be the old maid of your family if you want to; you’ve just claim to the honor, but *I have n’t*, for Connie’s only twenty, and already engaged; so *she’s* safe you see, and Gail’s not likely to put on blue spectacles for a little while I reckon,” laughed Polly. “Besides,” she continued, “*I hate* to be called *Miss Howland*, especially by people I’ve known all my life! It sounds so silly and affected! But what did you want of me—well, what *shall* I call you? Do you want me to do the high and mighty act and call you *Miss Simpson* in future?”

“You are perfectly incorrigible! No, of course not! Call me *Agnes* just the same as ever, but I thought that right out here in public and with all these people around you, and such an important matter pending, it



would sound much more dignified to call you Miss Howland, you see. But, of course, you can be simple Polly to the end of the story if you prefer."

Polly was fully aware of the intentional sting in the use of the adjective but gave no indication of the fact.

"All right, I'll be simple Polly and you can be silly Agnes. Is it a bargain? I'm sure I'm willing if you are," and Polly broke into a merry laugh quite free from malice, for the whole thing struck her as irresistibly funny. In some respects Polly was still very much the little girl, but in others far saner and wiser than the affected little "Miss Simpson," who was only two years her senior, but whose wits were no match for Polly's, and who could never attain to her plane of straight-forward directness.

The group was strolling along very leisurely, most of them listening to the bantering words of the two girls. Presently they reached a corner where their ways divided and Agnes said:

"Well, your curiosity does n't seem to be very keen. Why don't you ask what it was I had to tell you?"



"Because I knew you'd tell me if I kept still," was the complacent answer.

"Really? I have half a mind not to, after that, and I would n't, except for the fact that I've got to take your answer back to the girls. Now please listen to me for just one moment, for, really, this *is* a very serious matter, and I hope you'll appreciate the honor, because it is a very great one, let me assure you." Agnes paused impressively, to let her words sink well into Polly's understanding.

"Well, go on. I'm listening just as hard as ever I can," was Polly's reply, her great gray eyes turned up to Agnes.

"I don't believe you are in the least impressed, or will be even when you know, for you are just simply the limit, Polly Howland!"

"Limit of what? Why don't you get *at* it and tell me what I'm to feel so honored by? How do you expect me to have a regular caterpillar fit over something I don't know a thing about?"

"Well, the girls want you to join our Mu Phi Psi Sorority. There! Does *that* impress you?" and Miss Agnes Simpson struck an attitude in order to note the effect of the mighty social shell hurled against



Polly's seemingly impregnable armor plate of indifference.

The Mu Phi Psi Sorority was a power in the school, and a keen rivalry existed between it and the Alpha Gammas of the Senior class. In most college sororities, a girl to be eligible must attain to a certain standard of work; must have given evidence of marked ability in one direction at least; in short, have the mind and character which would make her a welcome addition in any refined, intellectual, cultured circle, no matter *what* her position in the great world of dollars and cents might happen to be. Alas! the gage of the Montgentian High School was not the same, and for some time this fact had been a source of disquiet to the faculty and to the more sensible proportion of the parents who took time to follow the details of their sons' and daughters' school lives. And there were a good many who did, in spite of the fact that there were a good many who did not, and for whom life held nothing of vital interest beyond politics and the club, or bridge whist, matinées, teas, and a round of social functions.

The Howlands had, as a matter of course, always held their place in Montgentian's social world, but Mrs. Howland had always



been known by that homely term, "a home-body." She was fond of her friends, always delighted to meet them, or to welcome them to her home, and before her husband's death had been a very generous hostess. But Mrs. Howland had never been a society woman, and her daughters, while fond of the frolicking common to girls of their ages, had some pretty sane ideas in their merry, happy minds, and managed to get a good deal out of life without rushing madly after that elusive myth Pleasure, as so many of their friends did. And, as a matter of course, that capricious feminine seemed to seek them, and nowhere in Montgentian was a cheerier, happier home than the Howlands'; nowhere did the young people of the town love better to congregate.

So it was not surprising that upon Polly's entrance into high school she should immediately have been chosen for membership by *both* sororities, each one eager to secure her acceptance before the other could get the chance. The fact that Polly had not yet had time to prove her mental qualities as a pupil did not bear a straw's weight in the matter. It was Polly Howland's *home* and social position in Montgentian which instantly made her eligible; not only



eligible, but a most coveted acquisition, for with her election to the sorority would very naturally follow, so reasoned some of its members, the entrée to Polly's home, the fellowship with Polly's friends, which they very much desired.

Now it must not be inferred that Mrs. Howland was, even in the remotest degree, that most odious of all creatures, the snob-bishly exclusive dame. Far from it! But there were just a few things she could not stand for, and for which, in some occult manner, her daughters seemed to have imbibed as pronounced an aversion. Among these were the ostentatious display of riches, the vain-glory of suddenly acquired wealth, the vaulting ambitions which those who had acquired it often showed to leap into favor with the people in Montgentian who by right of birth, breeding, and character held their places as the most honored and respected members of society, entirely regardless of their bank accounts. Indeed, the most colossal bank account would not have had the slightest weight in swaying Mrs. Howland's or her daughters' favors toward purse-proud ignorance or vulgarity.

And Polly, without being at all conscious of the fact, was one of the stanchest of this



standard's upholders. It mattered not a whit to her whether her friends wore the latest-style garments, carried a little bagful of coins wherewith to treat their friends, lived in the most fashionable quarter of the town, had their horses and autos, or not. It was the *girl*, or *boy*, and what they themselves *were* which won and held Polly's friendship. From childhood she and Ralph had been boon-companions, and when adversity overtook the latter, both Mrs. Howland and Polly had stood by Mrs. Wilbur and Ralph.

When Agnes Simpson had delivered this stupendous piece of news to Polly, she drew back to observe the effect of her words, fully expecting a rapture on Polly's part, for very rarely were Freshmen "called," much less "chosen."

For a few moments Polly looked from one to another of the group of which she was the centre, and upon whom all eyes were fixed. More than one would have given all he or she possessed to be in Polly's shoes. Of course there could be no possible doubt as to what her reply would be, and when she finally turned to Ralph and asked, as though it were quite a matter of course, "What is the name of *your* fraternity,



Ralph? I don't believe you've ever even thought to tell me a thing about it, you mean thing!" that simple question had something of the effect of a dynamite bomb.



## CHAPTER IX

### AN HONOR DECLINED

WITH all her sharp wits Polly was entirely free from any taint of a suspicious nature. She was too honest, and too ready to believe all others honest, to harbor such an undesirable quality in her character.

So two or three very portentous moments passed after her simple question to Ralph, and it took all of those two or three minutes to put Polly wise to the fact that she had in some way made a home thrust. Ralph's face had grown redder and redder; Agnes's retrousse nose seemed to reach her eyebrows; the face of the boy standing near Ralph, his chum and classmate, wore the expression of a thunder cloud, and all the others appeared to be about as uncomfortable as possible. Then Polly, as usual, came to the front:

"Ralph Wilbur, why don't you answer a perfectly simple question? *You've* been in the High two years and if any one knows



anything about the frats and—and—oh, *sats*, for short, you ought to. Which is yours? I know you boys have two just like the girls, though you always tried mighty hard to keep the grammar girls and boys from learning any of your old secrets or what you did. We *did n't* get to know much, and that's the truth, you are so everlastingly canny, but I know the girls have a Mu Phi Psi, and an Alpha Gamma, and the boys a Delta Zeta Eta, and the Alpha Epsilon, but what good the old things do you, or the fun in them, I've yet to learn. Which is yours?"

"Neither. I'm not in a frat," answered Ralph, and possibly he would never in all his life have a harder question to answer truthfully.

"Not in a frat!" cried Polly, incredulously. "And why not, I'd like to know?"

"Not enough brains, I guess. But come on, let's get toward home; I've got a holy terror of a geometry prob to dope out between this and to-morrow at nine A.M."

"Not brains enough! Then how do you happen to stand highest in that same geometry and skip all your exams I'd like to know? I've managed to find out *that* much even if I've only just entered High."



“Polly Howland, are you going to give me your answer regarding the Mu Phi Psi’s, or are you going to stand there talking hot air to Ralph Wilbur for a half hour? *I’ve* got to get home to luncheon, and then attend a meeting of our sorority at three, and if you think I can, looking like a fright, you are *very* much mistaken. One of the first rules of the society is a proper regard of its members for their personal appearance, and let me tell you right here, that *your* perfect taste has had no little bearing upon the girls’ choice of *one* new member at least; I’ll not mention names.”

“Fiddle-dee-dee for their choice then, if my clothes can influence it,” retorted Polly hotly. “In the first place it is n’t *my* taste at all, but mother’s and Constance’s; if they happen to know that browns and deep copper tints look better with my red mop than other colors do, it’s, it’s—well I reckon, it’s because they belong to the kind of folks who know what looks well because it’s just naturally born in ’em to, and they can’t help it; they don’t even have to think about it. As for me—why I don’t care one little hoop-de-doodle about my clothes so long as they are comfortable and don’t jump out at every other color that comes near ’em. So if it



is my *clothes* you want, I'll send a whole pile of 'em along. As for wanting *me*, I don't see how you can tell yet whether you want me or not, for I have n't done one single thing in High to make me worth while, and Ralph *has* done a lot, yet *he* is n't in one of the societies, he says. Now, *why* is n't he? That's what I want to know and it's what I'm going to find out before I join any Mu Phi Psi's or Alpha Gamma's or any other old sororities no matter *how* much they admire my duddies. My gracious, I wonder what Gail would say if she knew all this? It is lucky she's up at Clover Dale instead of here! I wonder if she was chosen for one of the societies up there because she has pretty feet and hands and wears the nicest shoes and gloves of any girl in the school? Those are Gail's weak points, and she'd rather spend her allowance for them than all the Huyler's and ice-cream sodas ever. No, I won't give you any answer now. I'm sorry, but I just can't. I may be sort of top-loftical and the girls may call me a stuck-up prig, but I can't help it if they do. Perhaps I am both, but please tell them I appreciate what I dare say *is* a great honor even if I don't accept it. There are a few things I'm going to



understand better before I enter any society though. So good-bye, everybody. Come on, Ralph, I want to talk to you about all this. Walk up home with me and have luncheon, mother is always glad to see you, and after luncheon we'll go and sit on brother Snap's rock and get this thing straightened out," and with a wave of her hand and a cheery nod to the others, Polly turned into the long, straight road which led up to her home. Ralph hesitated just one second, then turning to the boy with whom he had been walking, asked:

"Do you mind, Harry?" The tall boy who was watching him and Polly with an amused expression in his wonderful blue eyes answered:

"Not on your life. Go ahead. I'll bet Polly'll get down to rock-bottom facts before she's done with all this."

"But how about the basket-ball meeting? I wanted to get to that later? That's why I was going home to peg away on my books."

"Come down to-morrow at four. We have n't done a thing yet, and I'm going to hold the place open for you until you can make a try for it anyhow. So long," and the captain of the basket-ball team gave a



cheery wave of his hand as he turned away.

The others started toward their various homes, Agnes pausing only long enough to say:

“Well, Polly Howland, I want to tell you *one* thing: *You* are the very first girl who has ever hesitated one second when asked to join our society. Why every single member was just wild and crazy to get in and jumped at the chance. I should hate to say you were a very foolish girl, but——”

“Oh, you may as well say it as think it, and maybe it’s all true, only—well, I tell you I’m going to think first. Good-bye, and thank you for coming after me, Agnes. Now, Ralph, let’s hurry or mother will think I’m lost, strayed, or stolen.”

When luncheon was over Ralph and Polly went up to Snap’s rock, as the rendezvous in the pine wood had been called ever since Snap’s visit.

Seating themselves upon the lichen-covered seat, with the gloriously tinted October trees beyond them and the softly-whispering pines overhead, they sat for a moment in silence? Then Polly began:

“Now, Ralph, you and I have been friends as long as we can remember, and



we've never had any secrets from each other, so far as *I* know. If we have one now it will be the first, so don't let's begin. You've never told me very much about your work in the High, or what you were doing there; maybe you thought I was too young to understand very much about it; perhaps I was. Somehow, until Snap came I seemed just a little girl, in a good many ways, but he made me sort of wake up and take notice, I guess. Anyhow, I've done a lot of thinking since our little talks together and since he made me guardian of the Colors. How beautiful they look from here, don't they, as they float out against the sky? Don't you *love* them, Ralph? Don't you feel as though you could n't do one single mean thing, or have a single mean thought down inside you while they wave over your head? I do."

Polly paused, and Ralph nodded. He could never put into words, as Polly could, all the emotions which swayed him. He could *act* quickly, but not speak readily. Without looking at him Polly continued:

"You have been in high school two years. You've done good work, *that* I know or you would n't be a Junior at fifteen. You have n't made any of the teams,



to be sure, but that's because you have n't grown as fast as the other people and have n't been as strong, but you are going to make the basket-ball squad this year, I'll bet anything; Harry Hull says so, and he knows. Why, do you know we've both grown like anything during these last three months? Mother has had to make all my skirts longer and you've had to have those trousers lengthened. Is n't it lucky so much was turned up at the bottom of them? Would n't brother Snap be surprised if he could see us now? I guess he knew what he was talking about when he gave us what he called 'setting-up drill' during those three weeks, and made us promise to do the exercises every single day of our lives till he came back. And we have, and just see what they've done for us," and Polly hastily unbuttoned the cuff of her shirtwaist and ran her sleeve to her shoulder, thus disclosing as firm, round, and brown a little arm as any girl of thirteen could boast. Ralph quickly removed his jacket and rolled up his sleeve also. The spindly arm over which Snap had repressed a smile was far less spindly, and the slight body which had raised that strong man's pitying glances had filled out until the midshipman's service



blouse and trousers were a pretty snug fit.

Polly eyed him critically, then said:

"Yes, you are lots bigger, Ralph. How much do you weigh now?"

"Ninety-two," answered Ralph promptly. "That beats eighty-five hollow, does n't it? What do *you* weigh?"

"Eighty-nine. Goodness, but we've gained a lot, have n't we? My coat's getting tight too, and mother has had to let down my skirt *twice*. I'd be awful sorry to get too big for my suits though, would n't you? Well, this is n't getting down to the society question. Now, *do* you know the reason, or don't you, why you were not asked to join one of the frats? You may as well tell me, for if you don't I am not going to stop till I find out from some one else, and *that* won't please you a little bit, I know."

"Well, if you *will* have it I suppose you will, but it seems just nonsense to talk about it. Harry put up my name for *his* frat last year,—you know we don't often get elected Freshman year, and *you're* in luck to be chosen,—but it did n't go. I did n't know or think much about it at first. I was too busy with the work, and mother was n't very well last winter and I had a lot of



things to do. Then this summer it seems he made another try while he and some of the fellows were up at the summer camp on Lake George. You know he wanted me to go, but I had this chance in the W. U. T. Co. again and it seemed as though I ought not let it slip. Anyhow, I could n't have afforded the camp, and there was the end of it. Well, the two things together queered me for membership with the Alpha Epsilon, Harry's frat, you know. It costs a tidy bit to become a member, and a tidier bit to *stay* a member and, well, I was a messenger boy, and mother's a librarian, and we live in a little flat on King Street and, oh, well—everything that's too darned silly to talk about," ended Ralph in disgust.

During this recital, which Ralph had given with more and more emphasis until the climax was reached, Polly's eyes had grown bigger and bigger and darker and darker, and the blood surged into her cheeks until they were crimson. When he finished, she sprang to her feet and with one hand braced against a huge tree trunk and the other pointing straight at Ralph, as though menacing him rather than the fraternity of which he had been speaking, she demanded:



“And do you mean to tell me that your having done something to help your mother earn a living, and that because you’ve—you’ve—well, you’ve had to be careful, some of the boys didn’t want you in the Alpha Epsilon?”

“Maybe the helping to earn the living didn’t count so much; it was the *way* I helped; that W. U. T. cap stumped one or two of them, I’ve heard, though some of ’em were ready to spoon all over me when I got into the togs Mr. Hunter gave me. Funny though, isn’t it, how little things queer you sometimes?”

“*You* may call it funny if you can see anything funny in it, but *I* call it too mean, and small, and contemptible, and silly for all the words in the dictionary to describe, and I tell you right here and now, Ralph Wilbur, that I wouldn’t belong to one of those sororities not if every girl in them came and begged me to. No! and what’s more, I’m going to begin this very day to plan out a club, or *something*, which will just run those silly things out of the Montgentian High School. You needn’t look, ’cause I mean just exactly what I say, and *you* are going to help me too. It isn’t going to be for girls alone, but for the girls



and boys together, and if I don't make it a success before brother Snap comes back, I'll know the reason why! And it is going to stand for something more, let me tell you, than eating suppers, and dancing, and wearing pretty clothes. Ugh, it just makes me *hate* the very name of clothes! The very idea of letting such things influence our friendships. Why, I'd be ashamed to let that flag wave over my head, or to act as its custodian, as brother Snap said, if I let such silly things govern my actions, and I just won't, and that's all there is about it."

"Say, Polly," cried Ralph eagerly, "suppose we try to get up a social club in the school. I mean one where we can have good times and nobody will feel out of place because he has n't got—well, his father and mother have n't got a barrel of money to tap and hand out all the cash he wants. I tell you, Polly, it would n't have been so funny after all if I had been elected to one of the frats. How the dickens could I have paid the initiation fee and all the other dues? Why, do you know what Harry had to put up for his? Just exactly ten good solid dollars! I look like ten-dollar fees and dues, don't I, with mother getting only seventy-five a month and the forty-five I



chipped in during the summer—and got turned down for the chipping—all I have in the world!” Ralph’s tone held no bitterness but his mouth took harder lines. Even at fifteen one can resent the inequalities and injustice of some of the standards of the social world, and the rebuff at the hands of those whom he considered his friends had hurt Ralph more than any of them guessed. Polly looked at him steadily for a moment, her eyes narrowing and her pretty cupid’s bow growing tense, then she said:

“Ralph, are you going to let anything as silly as a boys’ society queer you?”

“Not on your sweet life! Only——”

“Yes, only?” interrogated Polly.

“Oh, well, *you* don’t know anything about it! You may not be a rich girl, but gee whiz! you’re not depending on your *mother* for every little fool thing you need. Why, Polly, I feel just like thirty cents when I have to go and ask her for anything. Maybe if I were a girl I would n’t, but I’m almost a *man*, Polly. Some fellows at fifteen are twice my size and earning their living, but here I am—gosh!” and the expletive held the most intense disgust.

“Ralph Wilbur, listen to me. You’ve given me half a dozen ideas in as many



minutes. Whether we can ever carry them out remains to be seen, but if we don't make one grand try for it I promise you I 'll know the reason why."

"I 'll bet you 'll do it if you set out to," was Ralph's enthusiastic reply.

"Listen: Hike along home now and do your lessons for to-morrow, and I 'll go in and do mine, then come back here at half-past five,—the Admiral has ordered Colors at half-past five now, because the days are getting so much shorter,—and after we have had Colors we will plan this all out. It's all sort of hazy with me now, but I 'll get my wits working after I 've done my lessons. Good-bye. Tell your mother you are going to take dinner with us," and, giving herself a little shake to settle her clothing, the next moment Polly was speeding toward the house. Ralph gave a good-bye wave and fled for his home.



## CHAPTER X

### THE MU PHI PSI'S RIVAL

THE glory of an October sunset was filling the world when Ralph came hurrying up the hill. It was just twenty minutes past five as he turned in at the gate of Polly's home and Polly herself met him, her beloved bugle tucked under her arm.

"Good! I'm so glad you got here in time to sound warning call; I was just going out to the staff; you sound it to-night; mother and Connie will come out as soon as they hear it," and Polly handed the bugle to Ralph. Together they hurried up the steep path to the terrace, and a moment later the cheery warning call for Colors rang out across the grounds. As the last note died away, Mrs. Howland and Constance came arm in arm from the house; they never missed the call if they could help it. They crossed the lawn to the terrace, Mrs. Howland saying:

"I'm glad you can sound Colors for us to-night, Ralph. These school-days are



such busy ones that they keep you away from us more than we like to have you. I wonder what we shall do when the long stormy days of winter come? Who will raise and lower the Colors then?"

"*I shall*," was Polly's emphatic assertion. "Ralph can't come and go then, but I'm right here, 'Johnny on the spot,' brother Snap would say, and I mean to be."

"I wish I could be too, but, gee whiz! I seem to have more to do every day, and less gray matter to do it with. But there goes five-thirty," as the stroke of the distant town-clock was borne to their ears.

As Ralph raised the bugle to his lips, Polly loosened the halyards and slowly lowered the flag. Down, down, down, it drifted, waving, floating in the soft October air until, with the last sweet notes of the call, it came within reach of her outstretched arms and was gathered into them.

"Oh, you beautiful, beautiful thing!" she cried, as she buried her face in its folds, "just *make* me think right and do right, for I'd be ashamed to be your guardian if I did n't."

Then the flag was folded as Snap had taught them to fold it, and Polly hurried away to lay it in the big chest in the hall;



the very same chest in which the shell-pink gown had lain so long, and which he had asked permission to carry down to the front hall as a suitable repository for the flag. That chest had some very sweet memories for Snap as well as for the others. Ralph paused only long enough to make fast the halyards and then turned to walk back with Mrs. Howland and Constance. When they reached the house Polly had put her flag carefully away and was ready to plunge into the subject now uppermost in her mind.

"Now, come up to my den, Ralph, and let's get something settled; we have a whole hour before dinner."

Ralph hung his cap upon the hall stand and turning bounded up the stairs after Polly. At the end of the hall, just between her own pretty bedroom and her mother's, was a small room which had been given to Polly for her own special *sanctum sanctorum*, and in it she had gathered together in the course of time a fine and varied collection of treasures. Here was her desk with its pretty brass appointments, its dark-blue blotter, for everything must now suggest the Navy. Just above it was fastened the Navy pennant, megaphone, and ribbons which Constance had carried to the great



Army-Navy game on that memorable day. On the walls were photographs of several of the battle-ships, Class Christmas cards which Snap had given her, and dozens of other precious trophies.

Even the rug and couch-cover were of dark blue, and the pillows on the couch displayed Navy symbols galore.

Giving a spring Polly landed in one corner of the couch and invitingly patting it said:

“Come on, make yourself comfy.”

Ralph needed no second invitation, and the next moment was leaning back against a big yellow anchor on a dark-blue background.

“Now, Ralph, what was your idea? I’ve got mine all outlined but I want to hear yours first. I don’t want to run the whole show, you know.”

“I guess you can run it a heap better than I can, though I’m ready to help. I talked to mother about it for a few minutes while I was down at the library this afternoon and she gave me some pretty good tips. She told me, in the first place, that up at college they would n’t take into their sororities any girl who had even belonged to one in any high school. The girl might



be all right enough, but it was the general opinion of the college sororities that girls coming from high-school Greek-letter societies were too stuck on their own ideas to be any sort of use to the college sororities, and they meant to turn them down. Then she told me about a school club she used to belong to. She could n't tell me much because there was n't much time, but what she did tell put some ideas into my pate, and I bet we could do it right here in Montgentian just as easy as anything."

"Quick, tell me all about it!" cried Polly, as Ralph paused for breath.

"Well, you know mother was never a real high-school girl; I mean not the kind of High we go to. She had the same work but it really was a private school where the pupils paid a tuition fee. When the real high school in that place—she used to live in Kenwood, you know—got so stuck on its old societies that it would n't have anything to do with the other girls if it could help it,—it did n't make any difference how nice the girls were or anything; if they didn't belong to the *real* High, as they called it, they were not in the running, and that settled it,—the *real* High turned them down. Well, it so happened that most of the girls



in the private school had the whip hand in a way, so they started their 'Social Club' and pretty soon it was the whole show and the orchestra thrown in. They had the cash and it did n't take them long to get the run of things."

Ralph paused for a moment and Polly was silent, her forehead drawn into a perplexed pucker.

"How does it strike you?" asked Ralph.

"It strikes me all right except for one thing, the shoe is sort of on the other foot with us. Of course, some of the boys and girls in our High can do almost anything they want to if it comes to a question of money, but then again a good many of them *can't* and that is the difference 'twixt tweedledum and tweedledee, and *I* don't want to start up anything that will make the tweedledees feel down and out, and I won't. There are a lot of mighty nice people in our school who can't afford dues and fees any more than you could, and yet they must want to have a good time as much as the others want to, and they *ought* to have it too. Now, why can't we fix it so they *can*? See here, Ralph, will you try to get five boys if I'll try to get five girls who will start a club with us? That will make a



dozen to begin with and then we 'll see what we 'll see. Of course we 've got to have a place to meet, but for a while we can meet here, until we get things started anyway, I mean. And we must have some money, too, or we won't be able to do a thing, but I tell you right now that whoever joins this club must be willing to *do* something to *earn* that money for himself and herself——”

“Polly, you 're a brick!” broke in Ralph, enthusiastically.

“Maybe only a blockhead!” laughed Polly. “We may not be able to carry it through after all. Now let's see what you and I could do to earn—say five dollars each: that would be a good starter, 'cause if we each earned five dollars that would be sixty if we began with twelve members, and sixty dollars would be a lot.”

“How about my photographs?” asked Ralph. “You know my kodak is a beauty,” and Mr. Stratton down in the village bought some of my pictures and said they were dandies. Perhaps I could get the Eastman people to take some too. I can try anyway.”

“Just the very thing! And now what, *what* can *I* do? I don't believe I've got



one single accomplishment, or resource, or, whatever you call it. I'm no sort of use, I'm afraid," and Polly looked dejected at this realization of her limitations.

"How about those things you made last Christmas? Don't you know you sent some to mother and she spooned all over 'em?"

"What! Those little brass jimcracks? Why, they don't amount to a hill of beans."

"Mother thinks they amount to a whole row," laughed Ralph. "They are dandies."

"Well, if I can *punch* out five dollars it will be as easy as rolling off a log. Why, Ralph, it didn't take me a day to punch those brass candle-shades, and I know how to make dozens of other things. Do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going down to see Mrs. Winter, she's president of the Woman's Exchange, you know, and I'll ask her if I may put some things there for sale. I've got some brass things put away that I made this summer; I really made them for Christmas presents, but I can make a lot more as easy as anything, and I need these right off. If I can sell them I believe I can get five dollars, maybe more, for they have such things in Dinsmore's and charge like cracky for them. Maybe mine are n't quite as nice, but they look pretty



good. Anyway, I mean to try," and Polly gave a little bounce in her corner to emphasize her determination.

"I'll bet my cap you'll sell 'em right off, and I'll get a wiggle on too. I've got a lot of photos I can use, and I mean to get busy and take some more this fall. It's dandy weather for it—so clear and still. Now the next question is, whom shall I ask to join this club and what shall I tell them it is to be for?"

"Common-sense, first, last, and middle-wise!" cried Polly. "Perhaps if we keep a fair supply of *that* on hand we won't get into a mixup first thing. Then there's another thing I think we ought to do: You know Mr. Stone just hates those fraternities and sororities, and has tried like anything to break them up, because he says they separate the school into cliques and lower its standards by making the pupils think more of social position than the school, and whether a girl or boy can dress as well as some one else, or if he or she lives in a nice house, or can ride to school in an auto, and—oh, a dozen other foolish things. Now if we sail right in without saying one word to him he will think our club is going to be just the same kind and he will jump all over



us, you see if he does n't. So we have just *got* to go and have a talk with him and put him right, don't you see?"

"Shall we appoint a committee, or just go ourselves?" asked Ralph.

Polly laughed. "Where would we get our committee? I guess you and I will have to be it whether we want to or not. I'm not pining to go down there and give a big talk, for I have n't been in the High long enough to be even a little toad in a big puddle, but, well, if a thing has got to be done it's *got* to, and there's no use taking a week to think about it and get so fussed that we can't say three words straight when we begin to talk. There really is n't any reason for being scared, of course. Mr. and Mrs. Stone are both mother's friends and I see them here often enough. Good gracious! I remember as well as can be when Mr. Stone used to set me on his foot and jig me up and down to the tune of 'Ride a cock-horse,' and here I'm 'Miss Howland' in his school now. Funny, isn't it, how just a little while can change everything? No, I'm not scared, but there's a difference between being little Polly Howland who used to call *him* 'Uncle Stone' when she was three years old, and 'Miss Howland'



who must walk up to 'Mr. Stone,' principal of the High, and say: 'Please, sir, I'd like your permission to run this whole sheerbang.'"

The laugh which floated down to the library, where Mrs. Howland and Constance sat, told its own story of appreciation. Then Ralph and Polly sat down to business once more.

"Let's both go to see Mr. Stone to-morrow right after school. You know he generally goes back for an hour or two in the afternoon, and if we can ask him about it then there will be no one around to bother us. I'll get down there before school to-morrow morning and ask him myself."

"Good! Then we'll both do our share later and—there's dinner, and *look* at me! Go on down and I'll come as soon as I've tidied my mop and washed my hands."

When the meal was over, Ralph said:

"Polly, do you know what I think we ought to do? I think we ought to draft a little outline of what we want to do, and just what we mean this club of ours to stand for. Mr. Stone will be sure to ask us forty questions, and unless we can give him pretty straight answers he will think we are a



mighty poor committee. Suppose we get busy and do it right off?"

"Come on back to the den then," and Polly raced up the stairs pell-mell.

For an hour the red head and the brown one bent over the desk, writing down, erasing, revising, then Polly leaned back in her chair and held up before her four carefully written sheets and began to read aloud:

"The Social Club  
of the  
Montgentian High School.

"An organization of the pupils of the Montgentian High School for the promotion of social activities without taking into consideration"—here Polly paused. "I don't like all that. Isn't there some word that will tell it all at once?"

Ralph thought a second, then asked: "How would 'irrespective' do?"

"Yes, *that's* it!—irrespective of classes ['That means classes in every sense too,' was Polly's remark aside] or standing."

"We hope to have a dancing class, an athletic association, a literary society, a musical club, and perhaps a domestic club for the girls and arts and crafts for the boys.



"Any boy or girl is eligible if he or she behaves himself—'that's awful, is n't it?'"

"Pretty bad," admitted Ralph. "How would it do to put it this way? 'Any boy or girl of refinement and good moral standards is eligible.' Or maybe we'd better say: 'Any pupil who appreciates the aims of the club and will pledge himself to uphold its standards—'"

"Yes! Yes! That's better.

"Any pupil who can appreciate the aims of the club and who will pledge himself to uphold its standards, is eligible.

"The initiation fee is five dollars, and each member must give his word to *earn* this sum in some way, and not ask for it from parents or guardians. This sum is to be set aside to meet the initial"—

("Is n't it nice I thought of that word?" cried Polly.)

"Bully!" agreed Ralph.

"—expenses of the club, and as soon as each member can earn and contribute five more it will be kept for a reserve fund to draw upon for emergencies.

"On becoming a member each girl is to promise to dress very simply when any entertainment is given, ('it would be silly to say such a thing to the boys 'cause they hate



to dress up anyhow'), and must also promise not to talk about their clothes, ('I don't see how they *can* anyway, but if they know they can't they'll pretty soon begin to find out that—that—well, that most people have got something else to talk about'), or make any remarks about other people's. Everybody must, of course, be *neat*, but over-dressing will be regarded as *very* bad form.

"We hope to begin with twelve charter members who will elect by vote the various officers of the club. We wish also to have a patriotic branch in the club whose duty it will be to keep informed on various important current events, and to thoroughly study the history of our country that each national holiday, or anniversary, may be properly mentioned, or celebrated in a manner to keep the events fresh in our minds and hearts. They must also follow the important movements of each branch of our service, the Army and Navy, and promise to honor the flag which protects us, and all members are to do all in their power to inspire in others a love and reverence for the flag. It is never to be used in a foolish or trivial way, but to be regarded as an inspiration for all that is best and truest in us.



“The club will meet at least once a week at some place mutually agreed upon, and we hope when it is once well established to have a regular club-room, or maybe in time a small club-house.

“Its members must pledge themselves to be truthful and honorable in everything they do, and to try to live as though each had sworn to keep this oath to the flag itself, just as men who enter West Point or Annapolis swear to serve their flag and their country and never disgrace the service by conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman.

“This outline may not be just like one a regular club of grown-up people would present, but it is what two of the Montgentian High School pupils hope the club will be.”

When Polly finished reading, there was silence for a few moments as she and Ralph considered deeply the statements of their paper. Presently Polly said:

“Ralph, does it sound a little,—a little *queer* to you? We know what we *want* to say, and we know what we want to *do*, but I’m afraid we don’t know how to *do* the *saying*. Suppose you try now?”

“No, leave it as it is and I’ll give it to Mr. Stone in the morning. If he takes an



interest in it he'll mighty soon know how to boost us along toward putting it into proper shape, and if he does n't approve he will be just as quick to give it a black eye, and then we'll be glad we did n't fuss over it any longer. Give it to me, for I must beat it for home. Good-night, Polly, you're just great."



## CHAPTER XI

### THE MU PHI PSI'S MEETING

EARLY the following morning Ralph tapped at the door of Mr. Stone's office. A quick "Come in," bade him enter. He crossed the threshold and, without pausing to think, saluted as he and Polly always saluted each other since Snap had taught them the regulation salute, then blushed in confusion.

Mr. Stone smiled, then, returning the salute, said:

"Mine was learned at a boys' Military Academy a good many years ago; it is not just like yours; who taught you?"

"Mr. Hunter, sir. But I really did n't mean to do it just now; I forgot; I beg pardon, sir."

"And why?" asked Mr. Stone, kindly.

"Why, it seemed a little fresh—a little familiar, I mean, I'm afraid."

"I almost wish we could introduce some of our military training in our public schools. I believe the discipline would be a good



thing, though I wonder how the girls would regard it," and Mr. Stone laughed softly.

"Polly would be as pleased as anything!" cried Ralph, enthusiastically, as though Polly's opinion were the only one to be considered for a moment. And then as though the mention of Polly's name recalled the object of his visit he drew from his blouse the envelope containing the statement which he and Polly—mostly Polly—had written the previous evening. Mr. Stone saw it and asked:

"What can I do for you, Wilbur?"

"Would you mind looking over this paper sometime this morning, Mr. Stone? Polly and I drew it up last evening. We are not very proud of the job, but we thought we'd better give you some sort of an outline of our plan and ask you to let us talk it over this afternoon if you approved. We hope you will, sir, because we'd like mighty well to carry it through. Do you think you could see us this afternoon sometime?"

Ralph had spoken eagerly, his face growing more and more alight with his subject.

"Will this outline you and Polly have prepared give me a clear idea of what you wish?"

"Well, fairly," hesitated Ralph, "though



there are a lot of things we 'd like to explain too."

"I 'm afraid I can't see you to-day, Wilbur, for we have a meeting of the School Board at three, but if you and Polly will be on hand to-morrow at three I can give you an hour or even longer, and will do so gladly. You and Polly are likely to hold your own here, I think. You have thus far, and I 'm pleased with your record, well pleased, and if you go on as you 've begun you 'll come out on top, my boy," and Mr. Stone held out his hand. Ralph was about as confused as the average boy is when openly praised, and, returning the hand-clasp, made his escape as speedily as possible, murmuring an almost inaudible:

"Thank you, sir! Thank you. I 'll try, sir. Yes, sir. Polly and I 'll be on deck—*here*, I mean, to-morrow at three sharp."

Mr. Stone interrupted with: "Now, I think of it, you and Polly would better come to my house. I shall not come back to the school to-morrow afternoon. I can see you at three, as I said, and give you an hour or so before Mrs. Stone and I start for town. You see it will be our wedding anniversary and we mean to have a little celebration. Good-bye again, Ralph, and good luck."



It seemed a long interval of waiting, with patience tightly corked up, and their hopes alternately soared and took headers during those hours, though, little as they suspected it, Fate was working in their favor, but in a way which seemed terribly cruel to others.

When Agnes left Polly the previous afternoon, that young lady was in a frame of mind difficult to analyze. That a Freshman, and a *brand new Freshman* at that, should arrogate to herself the *choice* of entering one of the high-school sororities, and actually hesitate to embrace such an honor when it was thrust upon her by a Sophomore high in social circles, was simply outrageous, intolerable! Yes, she must be made to understand, and very fully understand too, the flagrance of her offence. Indeed, if she were blackballed after Agnes had told of her unpardonable indifference it would just serve the little chit *exactly* right. All these thoughts were seething and fuming through Agnes's rattlepated brain as she made her way to the sorority room at three P.M., for a meeting had promptly been called. No time must be lost in nominating (capturing would have been a more apt word) this new member so desirable to both sororities. That the new member-elect might have some idea



and voice in the matter herself was a phase in the development of things which the Mu Phi Psi's, at least, never considered possible. So Agnes set forth in a frame of mind it would be hard to describe.

Only a few girls were present, but enough to decide upon the following afternoon at four for the election of the nominees. After some details for the next day had been arranged the meeting adjourned.

The rooms rented by the sorority were not far from the school. Of course, as minors, the girls themselves could not sign a lease, but one Mamma did sign, whose end and aim of ambition was to have her Lucette a member of Mu Phi Psi's the M. P. P.'s were just a *trifle* more exclusive than the Alpha Gamma's, who were a little, just a *little*, inclined to admit within their circle some—well, some members whom the Mu Phi Psi's regarded as social outsiders. For instance, Betty Stark was a member, and even though this particular Betty Stark could trace her descent straight from the famous "Betty Stark" who was to be a widow if her brave husband failed in his hazardous undertaking, and was one of the brightest little Sophomores in the school and a very charming, lovable girl in every re-



spect, a most unkind fate had decreed that she should not be the fortunate possessor of great wordly wealth, must live modestly, and do not a little toward the comfort and well-being of two brothers and a sister younger than herself. Betty's home was—hush, don't breathe it!—in *an apartment* house in the very heart of the town. True, it was a most attractive apartment and well appointed, and its roof sheltered about a dozen very charming families, most of whose children attended the public schools of Montgentian, and two of whose daughters were college girls, but—a *trolley* line ran in front of it! Think of living on a street with a trolley line! Horribly vulgar locality! And still worse, some of the pupils who came to the High from that same apartment actually brought their luncheon with them in *boxes*! Deliciously dainty little luncheons, often prepared by mother's own hands, no doubt, but *still* luncheons brought from home instead of *purchased at* the school lunch-room in the building, or, far better form, at Ramsdell's on Broad Street, where one could get a perfect love of a caramel sundae, or a glass of ice-cream soda, if the weather happened to incline one to cooling refreshments, or possibly a chocolate éclair,



or a ravishing lady-lock if zero weather set the shivers running down one's back at the thought of ice-cream. Good gracious! who would consider mother's delicate chicken sandwiches, or dainty slices of wholesome home-made bread, spread with orange marmalade that simply melted in your mouth, and left with you for hours a delightful reminder of its flavor, to say nothing of a good generous slice of Bridget's chocolate cake, baked by that same Bridget for love of Betty or Betty's scapegrace brother Jack. Ugh, horrible thought, it had journeyed to school in a *box*!

Agnes was late in reaching the club-room the following afternoon, and as she climbed the last step of the stairs her ears were assailed by a perfect magpie chattering of voices. She hurried into the room to be greeted by:

"Oh, you *dear* thing! What has made you so late? We are just simply perishing to begin, for there are *three* new members to be initiated, and you have n't heard one single thing of the new initiation rites for this year yet. Go take off your things just as quick as ever you can [English does n't count in the Mu Phi Psi's] and come on."

"And where is Miss Howland? I



thought you were to bring her with you?" cried Paula Weisman, the member of the Mu Phi Psi's most eager to secure Polly Howland for membership, and the one who had urged prompt action in that direction, and an early meeting in order to clinch the membership and give that young lady no possible chance to change her mind and perhaps be swayed toward the Alpha Gammas; a contingency too dreadful for the Mu Phi Psi's to contemplate for one second. The reply hurled back at her as Agnes hurried into the dressing-room to lay aside her things was a figurative bomb.

"Oh, don't mention Miss Howland to me! She is n't fit to be allowed out of her nursery yet. She is a mere baby, with no more idea of what it means to be asked to join this sorority than a child of two would have. And what's more, you need not count on *her*, for she will never be one of us, and I, for one, don't care if she is n't. *Such a little fool!*"

Naturally these words left considerable food for speculation and there was no lack of it as the door closed behind Agnes.

"Do you really think Polly Howland has declined this honor? Never! She may be mighty independent, and have a pretty



good idea of her position in Montgentian, but, *thus far*, she has n't *any* whatsoever in the High, and if she misses *this* chance to settle it she may just as well make up her mind to drop out of the running, and have done with it."

"What *do* you suppose Agnes could have said to stir her up? You know she is quite capable of doing such things," were some of the charitable comments behind Agnes's back.

The room which Agnes entered was a large, cheery one on the second floor of a building used mostly by professional men. On the first floor was an extensively patronized apothecary shop; a doctor had his offices opposite the club-room; a dentist was on the floor above. Mamma had taken all these facts into consideration when renting the three rooms, and the Mu Phi Psi's had furnished them forth in a manner which the members of an adult club might regard as almost luxurious. The dues of this particular sorority were more of a tax upon some of its members than those members would permit others to suspect, and instead of the demands upon the resources of the club lessening with an increased membership, they increased at a rate almost stagger-



ing to the girls whose parents' incomes were modest, and it was the parents who invariably had to meet them. More than one mother had gone without a new fall hat, or denied herself a new gown in order that Paula, or Fanny, or Irene might meet her five-dollar dues promptly, or buy the sorority pin, and ribbons, and banners, and heavens knows what not. That they might possibly get busy and earn the wherewithal themselves never occurred to the girls, or, if it did, the thought was instantly strangled: the very idea of its members *earning* anything for it would be enough to stamp the club as an exceedingly mediocre affair, and the rich members would very naturally resign. *Then* where would the club's prestige be? No! Emphatically the club must stand for exactly what it was: the social dividing line between the aristocrats and the plebeians of the school. Hail American Democracy!

There were three new members to be elected this afternoon, and after Agnes had joined them and in a measure made them grasp the enormity of Polly's defection, and heinous lack of appreciation, the subject was 'dropped for the more vital interests of the moment, though by no means dismissed



from the thoughts of the sorority members. It would be discussed *pro* and *con* in private. The girls to be initiated this afternoon were a Sophomore and two Juniors. The Sophomore had recently come to Montgentian from a New York borough, where she had attended one of the largest public schools and would have been elected a member of that chapter of the Mu Phi Psi's had she remained there. The secretary of that chapter had written to the secretary of the Montgentian Chapter and the matter was forthwith settled save for the actual initiation. The other girls, the Juniors, were Montgentian girls who thus far in their careers had not attained to the honor of membership, but during the previous summer "trifles light as air" had swayed popular favor in their direction and behold! the tide had turned. They had removed from a remote quarter of Montgentian to new homes in a fashionable locality. What more was needed? They were upon the brink of a social triumph.

It is not necessary to follow the more formal proceedings of the meeting. The most vital ones transpired during the initiation ceremonies. By order of Miss Hobson, the president of the chapter, each girl



had brought with her a sheet and a pillow case which at the conclusion of the serious side of the meeting she proceeded to wrap and pin about her, the pillow case, in which peep-holes and a breathing place had been cut, being drawn over her head. Each candidate for membership followed the example of her exalted sisters and presently all were arrayed *à la* ghost.

When all was ready, the president of the chapter said:

“Our first step this evening in initiating our new members will be our love feast. You have already taken your vows, and sworn to obey the laws of our Sorority and to keep its secrets. We will now partake of our sacred Macaronkali Ambrosia. Three of our older members will have the honor of presenting the dish to their newly-elected sisters, who may remove their pillow-cases while partaking.”

Amidst suppressed giggles, three of the girls went into an adjoining room which had been fitted up as a kitchen, gas-range, refrigerator, and the whole paraphernalia complete, and presently returned bearing upon small trays three steaming bowls of a villainous-smelling concoction, which they handed to the new members.



“You will partake of these sacred viands in perfect silence, and as speedily as possible. One single sound uttered during the consumption of this delectable and delicious love-offering renders the members ineligible, and their membership is likely to be revoked,” said the president, impressively, and added, “Begin.”

Each girl solemnly raised her bowl to her lips, and, as instructed, began to gulp down the steaming nauseous mess. Any one who has unexpectedly found her mouth full of hot soapsuds will have some idea of how this stuff tasted. The victims had no idea what it was, but they felt that upon their instant consumption of it rested their claim to membership in this great and glorious Sorority, and had it been a concoction of aloes it would have been gulped down somehow. In reality, it was macaroni boiled in brown soapsuds; the sort of soap which the janitress of the building used to scrub the floors with. Happily, the bowls were not large ones, and within a few minutes the horrible stuff had vanished.

“We will now have our ghost-dance, and after that will follow the feast of reason and the flow of soul for which our Sorority stands. Grace, I hope, as Chairman of the



Entertainment Committee you have seen to your part."

"You may count on me for that, Miss President," was the laughing reply as Grace vanished into the little kitchen, the other girls rushing to the four large windows to lower the green window-shades, close the inside blinds, and draw the heavy curtains in order to exclude every particle of daylight and instantly plunge the room into midnight blackness. As the last ray of the afternoon sunlight was excluded, a girl came in from the kitchen, carrying a bottle of alcohol and a saucer which contained a handful of salt. Placing her saucer of salt upon the table, she proceeded to pour alcohol upon it and light it, then stood the bottle not far from it. Instantly the room was enveloped in a weird, uncanny light, the white robes and head coverings of the girls assuming odd proportions in the flame's flickerings. A girl seated herself at the piano and began a doleful minor selection suggestive of a dirge, though played a little faster, perhaps. The president started the procession and all fell in line. Round and round they circled, now here, now there, waving arms, swaying bodies, and voicing low moans. No camp-meeting of negroes in the far South



was ever better primed for emotional demonstrations than these seventeen girls, ranging in age from fifteen to eighteen, and all keyed up to a pitch which must respond to any influence. Gradually the music grew more rapid, and the swaying procession moved faster, their moans changing to a wild chant with a jargon of meaningless words—meaningless, at least, to the newly-elected and duly-impressed members, who, truth to tell, were hardly in a condition to follow very clearly either the air or the words of the chant, for the mixture of which they had partaken, combined with the swaying of their bodies, had begun to get in its fine work.

Faster and faster moved the revellers, wilder and wilder grew the chant, madder and madder became the music,—heaven save the mark!—played upon the long-suffering piano. The room at best was not over twenty by thirty feet by eleven high, and, given seventeen girls in that number of cubic feet of air, with every particle of ventilation shut off and the fumes of burning alcohol filling it, not many minutes were needed to so vitiate the atmosphere that very few could survive the tax upon lungs and heart. Moreover, there is inevitably one



fool in every gathering whether of young or old, and this gathering was no exception. This particular fool had, unfortunately, been the one to suggest and prepare the saucer of alcohol and salt, and, as though her folly had not gone far enough with that, she must needs leave the eight-ounce bottle of alcohol upon the table beside the blazing fluid in order to have it at hand to replenish her saucer.

Well, the sequel is not hard to foresee. Netta Blackwell, the Sophomore from the New York borough, while whirling around in the mad rush grew giddy, ill, then faint as she passed the table; the next moment she swayed and staggered against it, the bottle tottered, fell, and the cork, carelessly inserted, flew out of it; there was a report like a pistol-shot as the bottle of alcohol exploded, the blazing contents scattering in every direction.

With a piercing shriek Netta Blackwell fell to the floor unconscious, and enveloped in flames. In the panic which followed, some girls with more presence of mind and courage than their companions, ran to Netta and strove to beat out the flames with their hands, but the majority ran shrieking to the street. Happily it was just



the hour when the shops of Montgentian were closing and the sidewalk was filled with people.

There was no lack of willing hands, and in far less time than seemed possible the panic-stricken girls were rescued from the horrible fate threatening them, and cared for, while a dozen men rushed up to the club-room to aid their less fortunate sisters. Some one turned in a fire-alarm and some one else summoned an ambulance.

Alas! there was need for it. Netta Blackburn would never be a member of the Mu Phi Psi's, and the girl who strove so heroically to save her would spend many a tortured hour in the Montgentian Hospital.

But let us change a subject so painful. That it is all true makes the tragedy the greater. One life was sacrificed to folly; another was made a burden to itself for years; one partaker of that love-feast of macaroni boiled in alkaline suds never entirely recovered from the effects of it, but spent her remaining days in a sanitarium, a victim of her schoolmates' folly, and a nerve shock which might have wrecked nerves far older and better poised than a fourteen-year-old girl's.



## CHAPTER XII

### OUR FLAG AND SCHOOL

MR. STONE's home, some distance from the school, was a pretty house recently built in the outskirts of Montgentian. They had no children and perhaps for that reason had taken a deeper interest in other people's. At all events their interest in the young people of Montgentian was certainly a keen one, and Mr. Stone had made an ideal principal of the high school. True he was considered a strict disciplinarian, though the most prejudiced was compelled to concede him a just one. He had been in Montgentian first as principal of the grammar school and upon the opening of the High had been unanimously elected its principal. As many expressed it, he had grown up with Montgentian's schools, and in one sense he had, for he came to the town a young man fresh from Yale's campus. Not long afterward he married a very charming New Haven



girl, and as time passed on she became as deeply interested in the school and all pertaining to it as her enthusiastic husband. Naturally, such mutual interest made for success, and even though Mrs. Stone's share of the work was never noised abroad, Mr. Stone invariably spoke of her as the "lady behind the gun," though said lady gave small hint of a combative spirit, her policy being wholly pacific. The high school had been open a little over five years and was prospering amazingly, only one shadow lying upon Mr. Stone's satisfaction in the process of development, but this shadow had increased rapidly, growing, as time went on, more and more ominous. To a casual onlooker it hardly seemed a shadow perhaps, and a few would have scoffed at the idea of it being called one at all. Indeed had those individuals been consulted, they would undoubtedly have pronounced it a high light; that it was a lime-light made no difference whatever, it was the light which counted. But to more far-seeing people, and among these were Mr. and Mrs. Stone, it was a very artificial light indeed and one very likely to hopelessly dazzle and blind some youthful eyes.

Soon after the high school was opened



Greek-letter societies began to spring into existence. The first was established by the boys, and called the Delta Zeta Eta.

It did not seem alarming and attracted very little attention until the girls, not to be outdone by their masculine companions, began to wake up and take notice, and then the Mu Phi Psi's sprang into existence too, and a rivalry forthwith began. The boys would not admit it to *be* a rivalry, but with each advance made by their co-eds, who were determined if possible to go their brothers one better every time those same brothers opened up a notch or two and sped onward, until it became a nip-and-tuck rivalry. Then, to add to Mr. Stone's dismay, two more societies leaped fully armed into the field and things began to hum. Mr. Stone did his best to combat their growth, even going to the parents in some cases, especially those whose influence in the community he felt would have weight, to urge their co-operation in stamping out an order of things which he foresaw must inevitably prove detrimental to the best interests of the school, if, indeed, not utterly disrupting. His corps of instructors were wholly in sympathy with his view of the situation, and so were the school trustees when the matter was put



clearly before them, but the rock upon which his most strenuous efforts split was—the mothers.

There are mothers and mothers in this world. Some wise and far-seeing; some foolish and short-sighted. Montgentian held both types.

The short-sighted ones saw nothing in the sororities but an opportunity for a royal good time and social distinction. One mamma, the one who rented the rooms for the Mu Phi Psi's, had found considerable difficulty in making social headway in Montgentian. She had money, "barrelfuls of it," to quote a Delta Zeta Eta, but somehow social success in Montgentian did not rest on barrels and mamma did not obtain.

But a most alluring opening presented itself in an unlooked-for quarter. Her daughter was asked to join the Mu Phi Psi's. Of course, if daughter became a member she would know so-and-so, and so-and-so, and mamma's entering wedge was inserted. Brilliant thought! Mamma did all in her power to boom the Mu Phi Psi movement.

But there were mothers with different views.

Not long after the Mu Phi Psi began to



bourgeon and flourish, a distracted mother called upon Mr. Stone to implore his aid.

"Can't you help me in this crisis?" she asked.

"I shall be glad to do so if possible," answered that beset man. "Heaven knows I would gladly see every Greek-letter society in this school disbanded. They are doing more harm than any one suspects."

"Will you talk earnestly to Katherine? She has been nominated for membership and I would give almost anything rather than have her become a member. I feel it would be most harmful in every way. In the first place, it encourages extravagant ideas which we can ill afford, and exclusive ones which are absurd."

"How old is Katherine?" asked Mr. Stone.

"Just fifteen."

"Then why not forbid her to become a member. It seems to me she has not lived beyond the formidable age," and Mr. Stone's fine mouth was curved with a smile.

"Forbid! Forbid! Why, I have forbidden until I am exhausted, but she just *will* join."

Mr. Stone shrugged his shoulders.

"Then I am afraid *my* word will have



very little weight." Nor did it. Katherine was elected a member.

Mr. Stone sat thinking of this interview as he awaited the arrival of Ralph and Polly this afternoon. It was not quite three o'clock, and the broad sheltered piazza was a delightful place whereon to enjoy his after-luncheon cigar. His thoughts were busy with the subject to be discussed by his visitors, for he had carefully read the paper prepared by them. And though he had smiled more than once during the reading and had once murmured, "How truly Polyésque!" he quickly grasped the idea and was prepared to endorse it when they hurried up the pretty flower-bordered walk.

Mr. Stone in his office at the high school was one individual, and Mr. Stone as host in his own charming house quite another. In the former he was compelled to maintain a dignity and reserve which nothing could break down, for there were a good many pupils who would have been only too glad to take advantage of any encouragement to familiarity. Indeed, in the earlier years of his career in Montgentian, Mr. Stone had met with an experience at the hand of an emotional young miss which taught him to beware of such. It was all very funny from



one view-point, but might have been exceedingly unpleasant for the newly-established principal had he been a less tactful man. It taught him a lesson, however, which he never forgot, and the scene was never repeated.

Polly was the first to reach the top of the steps, and advancing with her usual frankness, held out her hand, which Mr. Stone grasped warmly as he said:

"On time to the second, Pollykins. How are you, little girl?"

"Fine as a fiddle, Mr. Stone, but out of breath from hurrying. We were afraid we'd be late."

"Not half a minute. How are you, Wilbur?" and a cordial hand was extended to Ralph. "I've been reading that paper and I'm keen to hear more of all this scheme. Come and sit down."

He led the way to his pet corner, and taking up the paper which lay upon the pretty wicker piazza table, seated himself in a comfortable porch chair, motioning his visitors to others.

A swinging settee hung close by and springing into it Polly said:

"If you don't mind, Mr. Stone, I'll sit here. I can think quicker when I swing."



“Perpetual motion, Polly? Body and brains both in action.”

“I guess so,” smiled Polly. “Mother says the only time I am still is when I’m in bed asleep, and then I’m like a log.”

Ralph drew his chair to the table, and resting his elbows upon it, dropped his chin into his hands and sat looking expectantly at Mr. Stone.

“Now before we begin to talk I want to have this understanding, and I want it to hold, bear in mind, or we may as well quit before we begin. That smacks of Erin, but it smacks true as well. I am interested in this matter as I have said, and I want to understand it fully and talk it over freely with you, and there is only one way in which we can do this: Will you both forget for the time being that I am the principal of the High and just talk man to man—oh, no, that won’t do, will it? Well, woman to woman. No, that’s worse yet. How shall we straighten it out?” and Mr. Stone laughed his infectious laugh.

“Shall I tell you?” and Polly’s laugh echoed Mr. Stone’s as she gave a little bounce which caused the chains suspending her swinging seat to jingle.

“Don’t lose a minute.”



"Let us call you 'Uncle Stone,' just as I used to when I was little. Not always, of course, but just now. Then we'll forget all about your being a grown-up and that you are somebody we both ought to be scared to death of, though we aren't one bit," and Polly wagged her curly mop as though admitting a serious shortcoming.

"It's a bargain! Come on. Now let's get busy."

Mr. Stone opened the paper he held and began to read from it. Presently he said:

"I think I have gathered a pretty clear idea of what you both have in mind and it's a plan I can heartily indorse, but you are going to run up against a pretty stiff proposition with the fraternities and the sororities, I'm afraid. How is it that neither of you belong to those?"

Polly's eyes narrowed, and Ralph colored. Mr. Stone was not slow.

"Hum. Well, you need not answer if you don't want to; I'll do a little Yankee guessing. Maybe a rival club will be wholesome. Now as *I* take it, this is only a new form of honor system in the school, and it is exactly what we need. Combined with the honor will be a good bit of fun, and that is a combination likely to work out



pretty good results: No honor, no fun, eh?"

"Yes, that is part of it sure enough, but there's lots more, don't you think so?" said Ralph eagerly.

"Yes, a good deal more. But how do you propose to secure your charter members?"

"Ralph is to ask five boys, and I'm to ask five girls, and that will give us a dozen to start with. The only trouble is we have no meeting-place. Ralph's apartment is too small, and my house is so far away," argued Polly.

"If we could get our members well in hand we might have a room somewhere just like the Frats, but that, of course, means money to start with and we haven't a red cent. We want to begin right, and not slump down after we've begun, for if we did all the others would have the laugh on us, and, by cracky, we couldn't stand that a minute."

"There'll be no laugh if I can prevent it, but I don't want to appear too prominently in the foreground of all this, or I'd queer it sure," said Mr. Stone, falling unconsciously into his hearers' vernacular. "Now, this is my suggestion: You can't possibly get together



until you all have a place to get together in, and it must be a place accessible to all. Polly is right; her home is too far away, and Ralph's mother is too tired when night comes to be bothered with a lot of rampaging young people even if her apartment were large enough to hold them. So how about using the Board Room down at the school?"

"The Board Room!" exclaimed the duo.

Mr. Stone nodded. "I think I can arrange it for you, and with only a few conditions. If you are careful to observe them, there'll be no trouble, I'm sure. If you are not careful,—well, I see the finish of—by-the-way, what is this club to be called?"

"We thought this would be a good name, and then use just the letters as the Frats do: Pro Vexillo Scholaque. What do you think of it, sir? You see we *do* want it for our flag and school. Somehow we never thought much about the flag until Mr. Hunter came here, at least I did n't, though Polly always has."

"But a lot more since brother Snap was with us," broke in Polly. "Yes, I like Ralph's idea. Do you?"

"Exceedingly. It means something, which is more than can be said of this Greek-



letter nonsense. That fever has broken out with renewed virulence this fall, and I foresee trouble. I'm glad you two have fought shy, because I'll tell you right now there is bound to be trouble of some sort before long, and it is coming from the sororities first—beg your pardon, Polly, but that is the truth. The boys have done some mighty foolish things, but the girls have done worse, and the last freak is the silliest of all.”

His hearers looked up expectantly.

“Don't you know anything of it?”

“Not a single thing,” said Polly, emphatically.

“Well, the very latest, I believe, lays an embargo upon the High lunch-counter. Any member of the Mu Phi Psi's or Alpha Gamma's seen taking her luncheon there may as well be resigned to her fate; she is out of the running with the 'smart set'; they lunch at Ramsdell's on messes calculated to kill a perfectly healthy ostrich. The lunch-counter at the High, run by Mrs. Thomas, is run well. Everything she serves is wholesome, her terms are reasonable, and she needs the income it yields her. By George! to hear a lot of little chits take a high and mighty stand because the counter is in the basement—that is one of their



grievances, I believe—and another lies in the appalling fact that *all* may patronize it, rather than the exclusive few of their own set—just naturally sets my teeth on edge and makes me want to—well, I'm a model school principal and I dare say I must not admit what I want to do," and Mr. Stone stopped suddenly, but Polly's laugh rang out across the lawn.

"If you are anything like brother Snap, and I guess most men are pretty much alike," was her sage comment, "I know just exactly what those things make you want to do. It's lucky I'm a girl and no mistake."

"You are a pretty good safety-valve, Polly. Better use her for one, Ralph."

"I have, oftener than you guess," answered Ralph, with an odd smile. Then he added: "But there are some things I would like to ask you, though I'm afraid we are taking up a lot of your time."

"Get busy, both of you; the time until four-thirty is yours."

For a half hour the young voices and the older one talked earnestly, and at the end of it a mutual sense of satisfaction rested upon the trio. Then a voice in the doorway said:



“Do you people intend to sit out there until sunset? Come in here this minute. There is just time for a snack before I send the young people home and carry the old gentleman off for our private frolic.”

“Old gentleman! I like that. If you consider thirty-nine *old* for a man, what do you consider——”

“Hush, this instant, you incorrigible man! If you tell Ralph and Polly my age I’ll never forgive you.”

Mr. Stone chuckled and winked. “I was n’t going to, but I threw a scare into her, did n’t I? Hi! I want you one better *there, old lady!*”

“She *is* n’t old, and she *is* lovely,” cried Polly, running to throw her arms about the principal’s pretty wife, for “Aunty Stone” would never be anything but Aunty Stone to Polly. “I know exactly how old she is because she told me ever so long ago, and twenty-nine is *young!* Mother says so.”

“Polly, you are,—well you are a very truthful young lady. Come and eat your cakes and drink your hot chocolate.”

“Oh, *will* we!” cried Polly. “Ralph, I don’t believe you’ve ever tasted Aunty Stone’s hot chocolate. You have missed a



lot; so come and make up for the missing.” Polly was as much at home with Mrs. Stone as in her own house, but Polly was pretty much at home anywhere, and Ralph, though reserved for a boy of his age, was never self-conscious. As they sat enjoying the little feast which Mrs. Stone had prepared for them, her lord and master doing ample justice to *his* share, she said:

“I’m just as much interested in this scheme as Gordon—I mean Mr. Stone—is, and if, when you get everything in running order, you ever need a chaperone, or patroness, or whatever this new organization elects to name her, I hope you will not forget me.”

“Oh, Auntie Stone, will you really, truly?” cried Polly, bouncing up to run to Mrs. Stone and clasp her arms about her, and look into her eyes with Polly’s own irresistible glance.

“Just you try me, my girlie!” was the hearty response.

Very little more was said regarding the plan, and shortly Polly and Ralph bade their host and hostess farewell and started homeward. As they turned into the main street the ambulance passed them, the horses on a wild gallop.



“Goodness! I wonder who has been hurt?” exclaimed Polly.

“Hi! Look yonder, quick! There’s smoke coming from Scott’s drug store. The place is afire and some one has been hurt, I’ll bet! Come on, Polly!” and Ralph broke away at a wild pace, Polly neck to neck with him.



## CHAPTER XIII

### A MESSAGE FROM OVER THE SEA

OCTOBER had passed and November, with its "wailing winds and wintry woods, and meadows brown and sear" was well advanced. For many days after the terrible tragedy of that fatal October afternoon a gloom hung over the pretty town and especially over the high school. Although Netta Blackburn had but recently come to Montgentian, the family was well known and had many friends there, and the tragic death of its eldest daughter brought deep sorrow to all. Of the two Juniors who were present that afternoon one was forced to drop from the school ranks forever; the other to spend two wretched weeks recovering from the effects of the initiation rites, and the girl who strove to rescue Netta Blackburn would bear the scars of her brave efforts as long as she lived.

It need hardly be added that the feeling became intense, though, strange as it may



seem, there were some parents who sided with the sororities and fraternities, declaring that the accident might have befallen almost any gathering of frolicking, heedless girls. Perhaps it would be more accurate to use the word "mothers" in place of parents, since, with a very few exceptions, the fathers were either quite indifferent to the affairs pertaining to high-school life, or, if a few thought of them at all, it was with an indulgent smile for "the kids' doings," or a frown for "the kids'" demands upon the purse of paterfamilias. But there were several ambitious mammas who, while duly horror-stricken at the calamity which had overtaken the school, saw no reason for the stand which Mr. Stone, in common with many of the parents, immediately took. Always in strong opposition to the Greek-letter societies, at this crisis he made a desperate attempt to stamp them out completely. Alack! he little realized their strength, or the proportions which the societies had assumed. Poor Gulliver, beset by the Lilliputians, was hardly more powerless, notwithstanding that Mr. Stone had allies where poor Gulliver had none, but as far as his allies were concerned, Mr. Stone would have fought a losing battle had not



aid come from a most unlooked for quarter, and to his surprise his confederates proved to be Lilliputians also.

When the excitement and horror incident to that sunny afternoon had in a measure subsided, Ralph and Polly began to collect their scattered wits and set about crystalizing their plans for a club. True to his word, Mr. Stone had one of the School Board rooms placed at their disposal, and the third Friday in November the prospective club members assembled therein. There were, as Polly had hoped there would be, twelve to make a beginning, and Polly's soul was filled with trepidation when she found that upon her devolved the duty of explaining the aim and object of the club.

On their way to the school, she and Ralph had carried on a lively discussion concerning this.

"Not on your life!" cried Ralph when Polly strove to place the honor upon his shoulders.

"But you are the *man* and the *oldest*."

"Don't care a cent if I am. If it were a club just for us fellows, I'd get up and spiel it all off forty to the minute, but with six girls all glaring—or giggling at me—well, I'm a quitter before I start, and that's



straight. I've nothing against the girls, and especially these girls, for you picked them out of the bunch and you've picked a good lot,—Betty Stark's a corker, and Olive Powell is a peach, but—well—nuf said! *You* can have your little solo all to yourself."

They found all ten present upon their arrival, for curiosity was at fever heat and none had delayed a moment; Ralph's friends, among them Harry Hull, Jack Brownell, and Carroll Stewart, were on hand, and as Polly and Ralph entered the big room they were greeted with a shout of welcome.

"Come on quick, we've been waiting hours to hear what it is all about! *You* may know, but *we* don't, please bear in mind."

"Hustle, Wilbur, what do you think we are,—wooden Indians?"

Ralph quickly removed his cap and reefer, pitching them upon a nearby chair, while Polly shook herself out of her coat and, removing one pin, flopped the soft gray felt hat from her bright crown; Polly could not be bothered with more than *one* hat pin.

"Now, people," she began, "Ralph and I have almost come to blows on our way down here, because each of us wants the other fellow—I mean other *one*—to tell



about this plan, but it is no use getting snarled up right at the beginning. To tell the truth I hardly know where *to* begin, and I've nearly gone crazy trying to think it all out and make it plain. Of course we don't want to run the other societies in any way, but we want ours to stand all by and for itself and have no connection with the sororities or fraternities. Maybe I should not say so, and I beg your pardon right now if I hurt anybody's feelings, for I know some of you already belong to the societies, but there are some things about them I don't like and I would not stand for a single minute. Of course I can't say you all must not belong to them if you belong to ours too, for that is your own business, only I do hope you'll—well, cut out some of the ideas they have. Mrs. Stone has offered to help us in any way she can and Mr. Stone will stand by us too if we just keep our senses. Now, first and foremost, let us agree to stand together for three big things, and I don't think I can make you understand what these are half as well as a letter I have just had from brother Snap can make you. You know he is on the *Rhode Island* and he has been mighty good about writing to me."



"Me too!" interrupted Ralph. "Corking letters, you bet!"

Polly nodded and continued. "This letter only came yesterday, and it sort of seems as though it had been meant for this afternoon. May I read it?"

"Of course!" "Oh, do!" "Yes, please!" "Sail in, Polly!" "Get busy!" were some of the characteristic responses.

"You know he has been away over four months now, more than half the time he is to be gone, and they have been to Honolulu, New Zealand, Australia, and Manila, and seen wonderful sights. This letter was written at sea, but mailed at Yokohama, and it has taken it all this time to reach me. I wish I had time to read it all to you, but it would take too long, for it is just a bouncer, but this is the part I particularly want you to hear.

"I often think of you and Ralph while way out here with leagues and leagues of water tossing between us, and I make little dream-pictures of what you are doing at certain hours. At the morning call for Colors I can see Polly flying out to the flag-staff with Old Glory tucked under her arm, and perhaps Ralph is there too, though I doubt it this time of the year, and school



work just a-humming. He would n't be able to get way up there for morning call, though I'll bet my best mess-jacket he will be on hand for evening call. I'm mighty glad we doped out that plan, little sister, for it's a heap bigger one than either of you people, safe back there in God's country, have any idea. You've got to get way out here at the back of beyond and nowhere, before you can form the faintest idea of what Old Glory stands for. I thought I'd graduated in that knowledge, but I know now just how much I did n't know. Why, Polly, wherever these big steel boats poke their noses people just go crazy, and when they see our Stars and Stripes, or hear the "Star-Spangled Banner" played, they go nearly wild with joy and enthusiasm. Can you picture any of our people growing so enthusiastic over the flag, or national air of any other country? Well, I guess not! Maybe our bump of reverence is not so big as the bumps on the noddles of the people of other lands; we *are* sort of deficient in that direction, and since getting out here I've questioned more than once whether we have any such bumps at all,—if they are n't depressive instead. We don't enthuse worth a cent most or much, do we? Well, we'd



better get busy, let me tell you, for after seeing the reverence paid our flag by the Hawaiians, the Australians, especially the natives of Australia, some of them half-naked savages, I begin to feel like a counterfeit quarter and a lead nickel.

“‘And the little Japs, Polly! You should see them—even the poorest, and when we over there in Yankee-land say “poor” we just don’t know the meaning of the word, but when I get back I’ll tell you a few things to make your eyes even bigger than they are now, and they are pretty big too, but it is too long a story to write, so I’ll say just this, the poorest little toddling Jap would gladly go hungry for the sake of having a tiny American flag all for his, or her, very own, and every last, slant-eyed little tad has *got* one and waves it, and shrieks, “Banzai!” until all the wind is pumped clean out of his little pumping machine. It has all made a lot of us sit up and take notice, Captain, and do you understand why? Just because those red and white stripes and that star-sprinkled blue square stand for our country, our homes (*I’ve* got one now to think about, honey, and I thought *hard* just then), liberty, freedom, and the right to do as we see fit, and



come and go exactly as we please. It's a great old flag, Polly! Stick to it! Swear by it! Look at it every morning of your life, and every evening when you lower away out there on the terrace think what it has made possible for every one of us, and is doing for brother Snap right now.

““ And now one more thing before I pipe down: In about one hundred and twenty-five days (count it by days for it seems to go a lot faster if you do) we will be sailing back to old Hampton Roads, as crazy a lot of men at the thought of what lies at that end of the cruise as were ever gathered into sixteen battle-ships. And, Polly, you and Ralph have *got* to be right on deck to see that sight, do you know that? Sure thing! And I wish mighty well that a good many about your age could be there too, for it will be a sight worth seeing and one you'd never forget as long as you lived, to say nothing of a liberal education, for you'd see and learn more in one week down there at that time than a dozen text-books could teach you all in a dozen weeks. Now get busy and plan it out! I know that a body can't twirl around on his heel without “bang going saxpence,” as our brother Sandy says, and I know, too, that “saxpences” don't



grow on bushes, either with you or Ralph, and the bush Ralph used to have got frosted, poor chap, but here is a little scheme of mine: Can't you two start up a little club or something, even if there are only a dozen or so members, and do something to get together enough money for the bunch to come down to Hampton Roads for a week? Carissima, Connie, and Gail will come of course, and you, Captain, are coming with them unless they want me to do things they never dreamed me capable of doing, but I want a whole bunch of you, and if I don't somehow manage to give you all the time of your lives I'll ask why. Think it over, Captain, and here is a little nest egg for a starter. I wish I could make it an ostrich egg, but my ostrich farm never amounted to much; as a poultry raiser I was never any good; I'm afraid my only successful crop was wild oats. But of this egg.

““Put it in the bank and see what you can do to add to it. Later I'm going to send another one. Meanwhile write to me what you think of my little plan. I'm keen to know.””

Polly stopped reading, her heart beating with combined hope and doubt, but the latter



was speedily dispelled, for with one accord her hearers rose to their feet crying:

“Hurrah for Mr. Hunter! Three cheers everybody!” until the room resounded.

“I’m so glad you all approve,” cried Polly, whose most sanguine expectations were far outstripped by the reception of her little speech, “and I really think we *can* do it. Of course, we would have tried to form our Club just the same, but don’t you think this is a bigger, bigger—Ralph, what’s the word I want in there?”

“Guess you mean ‘incentive,’” answered Ralph, coloring.

“Yes, thanks, that is it,” resumed Polly, not half as fussed at her inability to command on the instant the word she wished to use, as Ralph was to supply it—“incentive to get together and to work for something we want very much than any we could possibly have? So, if you all agree, we will begin our plans right now. It seems to me our first step is to elect a president, a vice-president, a secretary, and a treasurer. That means four out of the twelve here. Shall we get busy right now and cast our votes first for the nominees then for the elections?”

Consent being unanimous, no time was



lost in writing upon little slips of paper the names of the nominees. These were dropped into Ralph's midshipman's cap as the most appropriate receptacle, and carried by him to the table at which Polly stood, Ralph then going to the blackboard to post the names as Polly read them off.

“ Jack Brownell.”

Ralph duly wrote the name.

“ Betty Stark.”

“ Polly Howland.”

“ Ralph Wilbur.”

“ Polly Howland.”

“ Harry Hull.”

“ Betty Stark.”

“ Polly Howland.”

“ Ralph Wilbur.”

“ Harry Hull.”

“ Polly Howland.”

“ Ralph Wilbur.”

completed the list.

“ Shall I post them according to their numbers? ” asked Ralph.

“ Yes,” answered Polly.

Polly Howland—4

Ralph Wilbur—3

Harry Hull—2



Betty Stark—2

Jack Brownell—1

“Now, we will take our vote and elect our officers, and there is something else I wish you would all do when you write the names. You know we want to have this just a little different from other clubs because its object is so different. Shall we call our officers president, vice-president, etc., or shall we use other terms? So far as I am concerned, I know just what I would like the head of this Club to be called, but I don’t know how the others may feel about it. So please write it on your slips.”

For five minutes there was no other sound than the scribbling pencils to be heard, then Polly asked:

“Is every one ready?”

“Yes.”

Once more Ralph’s cap did duty and he carried it to the table and handed it to Polly, but this time Polly backed down ignominiously. Shaking her head, she said:

“No, I won’t read them! Come up here, Harry, and read the names as Ralph takes the slips from the cap.”

Harry came quickly forward, and, taking the slips Ralph held toward him, read:



- 1 "For Chief, Betty Stark."
- 2 "For Captain, Polly Howland."
- 3 "For Captain, Ralph Wilbur."
- 4 "For President, Harry Hull."
- 5 "For Captain, Ralph Wilbur."
- 6 "For Leader, Polly Howland."
- 7 "For Head, Jack Brownell."
- 8 "For Captain, Polly Howland."
- 9 "For Commander, Harry Hull."
- 10 "For President, Ralph Wilbur."
- 11 "For Captain, Polly Howland."
- 12 "For Commodore, Polly Howland."

At the end of this reading the room was in a gale, for hardly any two had used the same term, and certainly some were amusing.

When the laugh had subsided the names were again posted upon the board. They read:

Polly Howland's votes	5
Ralph Wilbur's	" 3
Harry Hull's	" 2
Betty Stark's	vote 1
Jack Brownell's	" 1

Polly gave one glance and collapsed into a near-by chair, her face the picture of consternation.

"What's the matter, Polly?" laughed



Harry; "you don't seem to appreciate your honor."

"But what—what *am* I?" asked Polly. "Must I be a Captain, a Leader, or a Commodore? You've got me up there for all three!"

"And me for a Captain or a President! Hello, Chief Betty! Got your tomahawk ready? My goodness, but we are sure enough a mixed company! Guess we'd better vote on our titles of office now. What do you say, people?"

"Let's make her Captain Polly right off. That's the best of all, because that's what she's been ever since Mr. Hunter was here. I, for one, say, 'Three cheers for Captain Polly Howland, Chief, Leader, and Commander all in one, and three more for Ralph Wilbur, Commander!'"

The cheers were given with a will, and before they died away Ralph turned to say: "And now three more for Harry Hull, Lieutenant-Commander and Treasurer, and for Betty Stark, Lieutenant and Treasurer!"

Again the young voices filled the room. Then Polly recovered her poise, and with a pretty dignity rose and stepping close to the table said:



“Perhaps you won’t all agree with me, and I may be wrong, but it seems to me brother Snap has given us our object for the club. First our flag, which he wishes us to learn to love and to honor. Second, our school, for which he wants us to work and do all in our power to make it the very best ever; to make it something we shall remember as long as we live, and recall with loving memory when we have grown to be men and women. And third, our friendship; as brother Snap calls it, our fellowship. In one part of his letter, he says: ‘Whatever you do, *stick together!* If you don’t, you might as well give up the idea of a club. Stand for unity of thought and action. If you elect a leader, stand by him, or her, loyally. If situations arise which are hard to handle, take a vote and settle it by that vote and *abide by the settlement*. Be too big to let small things trouble you, and too strong in your concerted action to let outside or individual influences disrupt you. Be true to each other and you’ll be true to all the world. And, Captain, listen to this, it may not strike you very forcibly at first, but I want you to let it sink in, because it’s all true, and it is what is needed a lot: Connie lives it every day of her life;



she does n't know she does, but that is why she is *what* she is. Try to live by a boy's and a man's standards of truth and justice, and help your girl friends to do this too. Now, maybe you think I'm reaching about a mile beyond me to find my hat-brim and your girl friends will want to jump on me and stamp me flatter than a pancake, but it's all true, Captain. The average girl, or woman, lets a personal vote enter into all she thinks and says, and is intolerant of the other fellow's point of view. She won't stand for her own conviction if she thinks she is going to be criticised, or somebody is going to say: "How could you!" Conventions are right good things, and the charts by which we navigate, but now and again we have to go on dead reckoning, Pollykins, for sometimes charts are at fault owing to shifting sands or—maybe—even subterranean upheavals. And it's just at such a crisis that the best captain uses his good, plain common-sense,—call it horse-sense, or gumption, if you like those terms better. Maybe you will want to give me the biggest raking over the coals I ever got for writing all this, but please wait until I get home, and meanwhile start the Club, get all going, and come down



to Hampton Roads to welcome brother Snap.' ”

Polly paused for a moment, and for another her listeners were silent. Then Harry Hull sprang to his feet, and said in a tone which carried conviction:

“That’s all to the good! Every single word of it! Mr. Hunter is exactly right—I beg your pardon, girls! No disrespect intended,—but I mean he is right about sticking to each other and all that. You may be all right, you girls,”—a smile hinted Harry’s private opinion. “I’m not going to get myself into hot water by airing my opinion, and I’m ready to admit, too, that some of us fellows could profit by those same hints, and I would n’t have missed hearing them for a good deal, but if all of us, fellows and girls too, will just adopt these standards and stick to ’em we will win out sure. What do you say, Ralph?”

“I say you are dead right, and I propose that our Secretary shall draw up a set of resolutions embodying all this and also any hints she has to offer. Then we can take another vote and revise and amend if we think best. What do you say, Polly?”

“I think it is all good sound sense, but there is just one thing I’d like to say before



we break up. None of us knows the first thing about parliamentary procedure, or laws, or whatever the grown-ups call them, and if we try to run our Club by them it is all going to seem silly and affected. Still we must have *some* rules, and we must stick to them,—Betty will plan that all out when she writes them for our next meeting. Have you thought of a day to meet? Don't you think Friday afternoon is the best? We are all free then. Those who agree to this please say 'Aye'; those who oppose, 'No.' ”

“Ayes!” came from all sides, without a single nay.

“Good! Then we'll meet next Friday afternoon at three o'clock and we'll get everything in shape for the real work or fun of the Club. And there's just one thing more I'd like to say, though I'm not much use when it comes to pretty speeches, I'm afraid, but I *do* want you all to understand how much I appreciate the honor you've done me in electing me Captain, and I'll do my very best to be a good one, and to live up to the honor, because I know it is a real one, and that our Club, if only a boys' and girls', can stand for a lot if we'll only resolve to make it.”

Polly was flushed and her eyes were



shining like twin stars as she ceased speaking, and with a dignified little bow drew back from the table and walked toward her schoolmates.



## CHAPTER XIV

### AT CHRISTMAS-TIDE

THE weeks which followed the organization of the Pro Vexillo Scholaque Club were the busiest the pupils of the Montgentian High School had ever known.

The Friday following the initial meeting the twelve members gathered once more in the Board Room and after two hustling hours blocked out their plans. Betty Stark had proved their faith in her executive ability by drawing up a very concise outline of the activities upon which the Club would enter, and had suggested committees and a chairman for each department. As there were only twelve members the activities would necessarily be limited for a time, but the news of the Club had spread like wild-fire, and at a moment when conditions were ripe for radical changes and a more sane outlook for the high school's affairs.

It soon became known that Polly, Ralph, Harry, and Betty were likely to prove a



power in the school world, and a power backed up by the strongest possible backing,—Mr. and Mrs. Stone, and some of the best-known families in the town. It was surprising to discover the number of fraternity and sorority members who sought out the “Original Twelve,” as they were promptly named, and manifested the liveliest interest in their doings. Not one of the “Originals” could stir a block without being overtaken by some school-mate who was loaded to the point of explosion with curiosity and questions. “What was the new club to be?” “Who originated the idea?” “How could one become a member?” “Would it be exclusive? But of course it would, if such people as Polly Howland and Harry Hull had anything to do with it; one was so aristocratic and the other so rich.” The Hulls were probably the wealthiest people in Montgentian and at the same time the least pretentious. These and a hundred other questions, sensible or silly, but each “Original” invariably answered:

“We can’t tell a thing yet because it is all so new that we hardly know ourselves. Next Friday we are going to have our first real meeting and we shall know where we



stand. After that we can tell other people."

On that momentous Friday the plans were earnestly discussed and the various branches of the Club decided upon. Polly, Ralph, Harry, and Betty were not assigned to any special work outside of their own offices, as these were supposed to hold sufficient responsibility, but the other members were parceled out as follows:

Jack Brownell, who was fond of sports, was to be chairman of the athletic branch, and Nancy Putnam, who was on the school basket-ball team, and as brimful of vitality and energy as her redoubtable ancestor, "Israel," was to represent the girls in this branch of the Club.

Ned Stark and Eleanor Russell, who were regular historical book-worms, would represent the patriotic branch and keep the other members' wits stirred on current events and the doings past and present of their land.

Frank Russell, Eleanor's brother, "the dandy," and "a fusser," with Olive Powell, "the belle," would look to the social side of affairs, since they loved dancing better if possible than eating, and were in their element when playing host or hostess.



Carroll Stewart and Helen Loder would stand for the practical side of things, for Carroll loved to "tinker" and Helen was a most executive domestic little body.

When all this had been duly settled, the form each branch would take was agreed upon. With the present limited number of members not much could be attempted, but when the limitation was mentioned a distinct commotion arose among the members and the Captain, promptly taking the hint, asked if any member had any suggestions to offer.

Then things seethed for a few minutes as member after member volunteered the fact that he, or she, had been vigorously cross-questioned regarding the Club, and in many cases the questioner had hinted pretty broadly that she, or he, would be delighted to have a more intimate knowledge of all pertaining to it.

"Then, why not let each charter member name some friend he or she would like to have join us?" asked Captain Polly, "and we will vote on them."

Never was motion more eagerly adopted or more promptly acted upon. Forthwith each member wrote the name of his or her nominee and a vote was taken on the mo-



tion. The result gave the names of seven girls and five boys.

"Will the Secretary please make a memorandum of these names and write notes to each nominee?" asked Polly.

"What must I write it on?" was the rather disconcerting question of said Secretary.

A titter passed over the assembled twelve.

"I don't wonder you ask, Betty," said Polly, "but I'd thought of that too. I bought some stationery with part of brother Snap's money because I knew we must have some. I 'phoned Harry about it and he agreed. The paper is over there on the window ledge. And now Commander Ralph has something to talk to you about."

Ralph stepped to the table.

"I'm afraid my little spiel—*talk*, I mean,—is n't going to hold as much interest for you all as the other fellows' and girls' here, because it has got to deal with just hard facts. You see we've got to have ways and means. Now we each want to chip in five dollars independent of Mr. Hunter's donation which was a dandy; twenty-five dollars just dropped into our laps, I call it. Polly and I have settled upon our ways, and have already done something toward



earning our fives. She has three and I have two-seventy-five with the prospect of more. Some of you I know have regular spending money given you, and some of you have n't. For those who have, the five would be as easy as rolling off a log, but for those who have n't it's a different story, and I don't think it would be fair to those who have n't if those who have just turned theirs in without an effort. We must all *work* for our fun no matter what our circumstances may be. Those of you who agree with me on this please stand."

Up came every member.

"Good! I'm mighty glad of that, and we'll all get busy mighty quick! I guess that's all I want to say. *How* each of you will earn your fives is your own business and I'm not going to butt in," and Ralph went back to his seat. As he sat down Betty rose:

"Captain Polly, may I speak?"

"Of course, Lieutenant Betty."

"Then I wish to say that it seems to me the notes sent to the nominees should contain little printed slips, booklets maybe, of the laws, etc., of the Club, and especially this particular rule, because the people will then know just what to expect, and whether



they wish to join us or not. They may as well know beforehand that it is n't all fun without work. And one of our members could print these booklets as nicely as anything. I mean Carroll Stewart. You still have your press, have n't you, Carroll?"

"Sure! And it works like a peach!" was Carroll's somewhat puzzling simile.

"Splendid! Can you print them for us?"

"You bet I can, and I'll be tickled to death to do it. How many do you want?"

"I think we ought to have a hundred anyway, because everybody will be asking about our doings and it will give us a sort of dignified air if we hand them a—a—what's the right word?" hesitated Betty.

"Use 'summary,' Betty," suggested Harry.

"Yes, that's it exactly. I have been thinking like a house-a-fire ever since last Friday and this is *one* of my *thinks*," laughed Betty; then she resumed: "So I stopped at the *Chronicle* office to ask them what they would charge to print such booklets—I had an outline all written out—and they said a dollar a hundred. Now we can pay our dollar to Carroll instead."



"Not on your life!" was Carroll's explosive interruption.

"Then you don't print them!" was Betty's quick retort, and in about one second a figurative hornet's nest was buzzing around poor Carroll's ears, for each member insisted that unless he let them pay him the regular rates the "job" would go to the *Chronicle* office.

"But I'd feel like a regular mucker to take your money," protested the boy.

"Mucker nothing! I tell you we have got to pay *somebody*, so why not you? That will be the beginning of your five, don't you see? Now pipe down and let Betty finish," cried Ralph.

"I've finished if you have all agreed, and the next thing *I* do is to write those twelve notes, and then try to earn my own little fiver."

When a few more matters had been discussed the meeting adjourned and from that moment things began rapidly to take shape and form.

December saw the Club membership increased to twenty-four, for not one nominee had declined and all of the twelve proposed were elected.

At Christmas came the first formal open-



ing—a dance given on Christmas eve, each member inviting a girl and a boy friend.

Mr. Stone promptly placed the large assembly-room at their disposal. Mrs. Stone offered her services in any capacity and was asked to chaperone the dance. Mr. Stone came to help with the decorations, sending out from town yards of bunting and a dozen flags as his donation. His “Christmas present to the Club,” he called it, while the parents who had received polite little notes to “witness the dance from the balcony,” vied with each other in sending in various articles for decorating. Harry Hull’s father, whose hobby was his greenhouse, ordered a wagon-load of palms and potted plants sent to the school.

The father of two of the new members whose joy and gratitude at his son’s and daughter’s election was almost pathetic, went to Mr. Stone to ask if he might wire the room for electric lights. He was chief electrician at the town electric plant, and up to the present time no one had cared to enroll either Tom or Mary Donaldson in a fraternity or sorority. When one girl had proposed Mary, who was a most lovable, brilliant girl, a cry arose: “What! Mary Donaldson? Why, her father puts on *over-*



*alls* and works in the electric plant!" So Mary was tabooed. But the P. V. S. Club was only too delighted to welcome both Mary and Tom among its members, and were equally delighted to have Mr. Donaldson who, in spite of the despised overalls, was a refined, able man, make the assembly-room a fairy-bower for them.

One of the prettiest features of that Christmas eve was suggested by Constance Howland. With thoughts of Snap ever in her mind, she suggested a Christmas-tree upon which each Club member, as well as any others so inclined, should hang some little gift for the children of the Jackies on board the battle-ship fleet, these gifts to be sent in the name of the Club to the new York Navy Yard, care of the Commandant. Constance donated a huge tree and Mr. Donaldson's skilful hands soon had it a thing of beauty with tiny red, white, and blue electric bulbs, while back of it blazed an electric "Old Glory." The hours he spent in that assembly-room after his duties at the electric plant were over, nobody but Tom, his able helper, guessed, but nothing he could do for the Club could begin to express his gratitude.

On Christmas eve the place presented a



wonderful picture to those entering it, and the number who did enter it made the Club members experience secret qualms as to whether they had properly gauged the supply of refreshments necessary. True, these were very simple, just cake and lemonade, so far as the members themselves knew,—the biggest surprise was for them, after all—for Mr. Hull had ordered a huge freezer of ice-cream. Mrs. Howland and Constance had made dozens and dozens of sandwiches. Some one else had sent candies, until every one was in a fair way to be made ill from too many good things. Enthusiasm was at fever heat, and when all the preparations were completed it would have been hard to find a prettier room, a more inviting refreshment table, or a happier lot of people young or old.

Promptly at eight o'clock the palm-embowered receiving stand, with its pretty rugs, divans, and pillows, was the centre of attraction. In the middle of it stood Mrs. Stone, fascinating and smiling, her gown a dainty white lingerie such as she might have worn at any afternoon tea served upon her own pretty lawn. At her right stood Ralph, in his Midshipman's suit, cleaned and cherished for special occasions, for that suit must



not be lightly used. At her left Polly, in her white duck "middy," dark-green holly leaves in her tawny hair, holly and a little American flag pinned upon her breast. Next Polly stood Harry Hull, and at his left Betty, each, in honor of the Club and season, wearing their holly and flag. Eight of the charter members acted as ushers, escorting the guests to the receiving stand, where, having presented them, they turned them over to the more recently elected members whose duty it was to escort to the balcony the older guests, and secure partners for the younger ones.

On the opposite side of the hall, in the shadow of the big tree, sat the musicians; not a large orchestra, to be sure, but a good piano, harp, and violin, the musicians having volunteered their services, for a daughter of one was a teacher in the high school, the violinist's son was the janitor, and the harpist's girl would enter the High the following year.

When the invitations were sent to the Club members, a few inconspicuous words in the lower left-hand corner requested that—

"The girls will please wear a simple white gown; the boys will please wear blue or black if possible."



It was not to be supposed that many of the Montgentian High School boys boasted evening-clothes or Tuxedos, but the Social Committee did not propose to take any chances of having those who did not outshone by those who did, and the result was perfect harmony of attire. Each guest upon leaving the dressing-rooms was presented with a little flag and a cluster of holly, and a prettier sight it would have been difficult to picture than the girls, in their white gowns, holly- and flag-bedecked, and the boys with their holly sprigs and flags in their left lapels.

Such a happy three hours as followed!

Never were hearts or feet lighter, never was music more enticing, never faces more radiant, and never did older people enter more heartily into the delights of the younger ones.

At ten-thirty supper was served by the Club members, the older guests being first honored, and "a mad, merry feast" it proved when it came the turn of the younger ones.

None of the older guests were allowed upon the dancing floor; Mr. Stone looked to that, and, placing himself at the entrance, graciously but firmly requested all late



arrivals, or stragglers, to go directly to the balcony.

When Mrs. Stone had concluded her duties at the receiving stand she joined the group of friends in the gallery just above it, this place having been agreed upon by her and the girls as the rendezvous in case of need.

After supper, Polly sought out Mr. Stone.

"Won't you please go and dance now?" she asked.

"*I* go and dance, Captain Polly!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, please do, because you have been so dear to all of us, standing here and helping and shooing away the grown-ups. But I know Aunty Stone just loves to dance! Two or three times I've seen her feet keeping time and I just hate to be having all the fun while she has n't one bit."

"Does she look so wan and depressed as all that?" asked the principal, glancing up at his wife who at that moment was the centre of a group of friends, her face radiant and her lips parted in a gay laugh.

Polly laughed from sympathy. "No, she does n't look exactly melancholy, but I want her to *dance* just the same."



"If *she* does, the whole balcony will pile down upon the floor and dance too, you mark my words, Pollykins. Tell you what I'll do though: if you will dance the next dance with me I'll get Ralph to ask Mrs. Stone, and the other P. V. S.'s to ask the other dancing grown-ups to take a turn with them. How about that?"

"Splendid! How will you do it?"

"Did you bring the bugle, Polly?"

"Yes, it is at the receiving stand."

"Will you sound attention call between the next dances?"

"Oh, Uncle Stone! What would the people think of me?" and Polly blushed.

"Think you are just *what* you are: a little trump. Get busy, Polly, and leave the rest to me."

Side by side they walked to the receiving stand, hardly noticed by the others who were waltzing by, and as the last strains of the music ceased, Polly raised the bugle and the call rang cheerily through the room. It created a sensation. Necks were craned over the balcony and a buzz of inquiry followed. Then Mr. Stone's clear full voice announced:

"I have been asked by the Captain of the P. V. S. Club to request each member



to choose a partner from among our adult guests for the next dance, as a slight token of her appreciation of the honor they have done the Club by gracing it with their presence this evening."

Then turning to the little bugler at his left side, Mr. Stone asked with a bow which delighted her:

"May I have the honor of this dance, Captain Polly?"

The hint was instantly taken by the other members and none was prouder than Ralph as he escorted Mrs. Stone to the floor.

The other boys sought their older feminine friends and the girls their masculine ones, and fathers, mothers, and relatives, who had long since declared their dancing days over, gaily two-stepped across that polished floor.

But prettiest of all was the evening's ending. At ten minutes to twelve "Home-Sweet-Home" waltz was played, ending with the "Star-Spangled Banner."

It was pretty to see the guests both old and young instantly follow the example of the Club members who were scattered throughout the room. From the first Polly and Ralph had concluded their meetings by standing to sing "The Star-Spangled





POLLY STEPPED FROM BEHIND THE PALMS







Banner " and had arranged to have it played to-night. As the boys and girls came to attention, each person present did likewise, and the eyes of more than one guest grew dim as the stirring notes filled the room and awakened in their hearts a thrill of patriotism such as they had not experienced in many a day.

As the last notes of the instruments ceased, Polly stepped from behind the palms at the receiving stand and placing her bugle to her soft lips blew the tender, lulling notes of "Taps." All that was tenderest, truest, best, and sweetest in Polly vibrated in that good-night song, and stirred her hearers to their very souls. When it ended, still clasping her bugle in her arms, she came from her leafy covert.

Then enthusiasm broke loose and, led by Mr. Stone, those present cheered for the little Captain and the P. V. S. Club and then crowded about her and the other members to congratulate them upon the success of their Club, and thank them heartily for a truly delightful evening which was unanimously voted the most brilliant entertainment ever given by the pupils of the Montgentian High School.



## CHAPTER XV

### CAPTAIN POLLY TO THE RESCUE

THE Christmas holidays sped away as Christmas holidays have a trick of doing, and during the week which followed the formal opening of the Pro Vexillo Scholaque Club a degree of excitement was evident in the town of Montgentian such as had not stirred it in many a day, so entirely new and novel was this innovation. The very fact that the older people of the town, who might naturally feel some interest in the affairs pertaining to the school world, had voluntarily been invited to participate in the Christmas-eve entertainment had instantly insured the popularity of the newly founded society.

Without the least attempt upon her own part to become a popular social leader, Polly found herself in that position, and some of her experiences made her wonder why people could resort to such flimsily con-



cealed methods in order to achieve an end. Polly was nothing if not honest, and any subterfuge or deceit upon the part of others acted upon her very much as a red rag acts upon a bull if flaunted in his face. Between Christmas and New Year's day Polly received more invitations to dances and various forms of holiday entertainment than ever before in all her short life, and was amazed to receive boxes of candy from boys who hitherto had been almost oblivious of her existence, and poesies from girls who had regarded "the little Freshman" as quite beneath the notice of their Sophomore or Junior world.

As to Ralph, he, too, had sprung into a most unlooked-for prominence and was surprised to find how many friends he could muster. At first he, like Polly, found it a little puzzling, but they speedily awakened to the truth of the situation, and with their awaking grew a spirit of resentment that such things could really be.

Nevertheless, there were plenty of "loyal hearts and spirits brave, and souls that were pure and true," in the high school, and, oddly enough, little Polly was destined to do some "sifting" and never suspect her power as a standard for honor, sincerity,



truth, and all that goes to make this beautiful world more beautiful by confirming one's faith in one's fellow beings. There were plenty of boys and girls in the school who were far above resorting to subterfuge in order to secure a place in the new Club which was gaining popularity with each day. If these were anxious to be enrolled as members they went straight to Polly or Ralph to learn all about it and whether there was any hope for them, and they invariably received straightforward answers to their questions, and in not a few instances speedily found their names upon the list of nominees and were in due time elected members.

One of the funniest experiences Polly ever had was with a certain little Freshman named Susan Swingle. Polly insisted that such a name was enough to queer any girl if nothing else did, though the name seemed to fit her exactly, or she fitted the name perhaps. She was a funny, expressionless little thing of fifteen, but looked at least two years younger. Her hair was straw-colored and absolutely unmanageable, hanging in hopeless strings two minutes after she had arranged it, if the term can be applied to a slipshod attempt at brushing it. She was



careless in her dress, awkward in her carriage and manner, and spoke with an absurd lisp, which puckered her lips as though she were about to whistle, and made her pronounce her own name Thusan Thwingle. One afternoon as Polly was walking home from school she met a girl accompanied by the impossible "Thusan." Polly had known the girl in grammar school, and knew that she was an enthusiastic admirer of the new Club. A lively conversation began and Margaret Chase had a rapture then and there.

"Wouldn't you just love to be a member?" she asked Susan.

"Oh, I don't think mamma would approve," replied Susan.

"Not approve when everybody, old and young, thinks Polly's club the nicest one ever!"

"Yeth, I know that, but—but—don't you thee there are *boyths* in it too, and mamma would *never* let me join a club with boyths. She doeth n't allow me to thpeak to boyths even."

Polly's eyes grew big.

"Why not, I'd like to know?"

"Oh, thee thinks they are tho rude and vulgar."



But this was too much for Polly.

"Poppycok! What nonsense! Good-bye, Margaret." The next day little Polly's eyes grew even bigger. Having occasion to go down to the basement to see Mrs. Thomas just before the noon hour, she almost ran into a boy and a girl who were partially concealed by a foundation pillar, and too absorbed in each other to be aware of her approach. A more sentimental picture it would be hard to draw, for the pair were billing and cooing like turtle doves.

Polly stopped as though petrified. The girl was Susan Swingle, and the boy, one whom most of his class had turned down because he was hopelessly impossible.

Then Polly's eyes blazed as she asked:

"Do you think *this* sort of thing is in better taste and less 'vulgar' than speaking to boys upstairs where all of us can see you?"

"Oh, pleathe, pleathe, *pleathe*, don't tell! Pleathe, don't!" wailed Miss Sentimentality, breaking into violent sobs. Her companion gave one glance at Polly which was returned with a look of such blazing scorn that it ought to have scorched him, and then fled for the stairs. Susan made toward Polly as though to detain her, but one lithe



spring carried Polly beyond the girl's reach.

"Don't come *near* me! I know now how much dependence to place in you! Do you judge every one by yourself? Go upstairs, you simpleton!"

Exit Susan, but Polly had received a lesson in wordly wisdom. Perhaps it slightly jarred her faith, but it made her value truth the more.

This all happened early in January, and soon after it was forgotten in other matters in which Polly figured as heroine.

January began with wretchedly cold, stormy weather. The thermometer, once started upon its downward journey, seemed determined to go out of sight entirely. Snow fell until it was banked on all sides, and this was followed by ice storms which coated everything. Mrs. Howland had never known such a winter since coming to live in Montgentian, and was more than once tempted to close her house and go to town for a month or two, so difficult had it become to get to and from Montgentian, or to the city. Then Polly's keen interest in her club and school made her think twice before taking such a step, and Polly begged her to wait just a little longer to see if the weather



would not moderate. Still another cause of disquietude for Mrs. Howland, although she did not mention it to Constance or Polly, lay in the fact that several daring robberies had taken place in Montgentian within the preceding weeks. Houses were entered, valuables stolen, and the thieves were still at large. The very situation of their home made her uneasy; it was so remote from the town, their only neighbors being Mr. Barber's family next door and a family living nearly a quarter of a mile farther up the mountain. Just at present Mr. Barber was South with his family and their house was closed.

True, both the Barber home and Mrs. Howland's were electrically wired with burglar alarms and had telephone connections with the police headquarters. Nevertheless, Mrs. Howland laid her head upon the pillow at night with more or less apprehension, and when she awakened in the morning experienced a sense of relief that another night had passed without mishap.

And so the middle of January came and passed. Then one night, when for some unaccountable reason, she seemed to have temporarily forgotten the fears which had caused her so many wakeful nights of late,



and had dropped into a sound, dreamless sleep, the climax came.

Since Gail's departure for boarding-school in the fall, Constance and Polly had kept the doors communicating with their mother's room open at night, but between Polly's and her mother's room was the den through which she must pass to go into her mother's bed-chamber. In the den Polly kept her bugle. Never must it be kept downstairs, and since this general alarm from the burglaries in Montgentian, she had been more careful than ever.

On this night Polly was restless, thanks to an over-indulgence in fudge just before going to bed. For a few hours she slept fitfully, but on the stroke of one o'clock, wakened with a more than severe twinge in the region of the undigested fudge, and, sitting up in bed, exclaimed under her breath:

"Plague take that old fudge! Whatever did I eat such a lot of it for? If it had been Ralph I'd have run him half to death for a regular greedy! I wonder if there is any Jamaica ginger in the bathroom medicine closet, and if I can get it without waking mother and Connie and scaring them half to death? If I turn on the light here they'll waken sure," and Polly crept noiselessly



from her bed, and drew on her heavy bathrobe and slippers.

The night was inky black and bitterly cold. Polly shivered as she crept through the chilly hall to the bathroom. Once there she closed the door, switched on the electric light, and a moment later had prepared her dose and swallowed it with a characteristic: "*There!* I hope you'll get busy down inside of me and stop that fudge's high-strikes!"

Then hurrying back to her room she scrambled into bed again.

How still the house was! How quiet all the world beyond her windows! Not a sound broke the absolute silence; a silence so unlike that of a mid-summer night with its myriad insect voices and the pulsation of living, growing things. This mid-winter silence was the silence of death in its icy shroud of snow. Polly shivered as she lay in her bed, but it was more from an indefinable dread of the hour and the chill silence which seemed so weird and unnatural. Far off in the distance a hound bayed his doleful note so in keeping with the hour and the scene. As the ring died away a faint noise came to Polly's keenly sensitive hearing. It seemed to be directly beneath her window.



For a moment her soul was filled with a vague, unreasoning terror, and a sense of helplessness, as in a flash she recalled the stories of the burglaries of the past few weeks. A slight shiver passed over her and she could neither move nor speak. Her first impulse was to rouse her mother, for she knew well enough that her fears were well grounded. Then in a flash came Snap's words: "Sort of dope it out yourself, Captain, and spare Carissima in every way you can." "Yes, if brother Snap were here now, and, oh, I *wish* he were! He'd know what to do," was Polly's half articulated thought. No, she would not alarm her mother if she could help it. But what was that sound? There it was again! A slight crunching as of a stealthy footfall upon the crusted snow. Once more Polly slipped from her bed and scrambling into her knit slippers and robe ran to the window to listen. The sound was not repeated. Then she went out into the hall, and crept to the head of the stairs. All was dark and silent. Squatting down upon the top step she listened with every sense alert. Then sliding softly from step to step she made her way downward until she sat upon the lower landing, an alert little figure enveloped in total darkness.



The Howland house was rather oddly constructed: as you entered the spacious foyer hall, you looked into every room upon the main floor. Had Polly's vision been able to penetrate the intense darkness she could have seen reception-room, drawing-room, library, and dining-room from her vantage point. As it was she could see nothing but the broad, low window of the dining-room, and this only in a vague, shadowy way, because the faint rays of an arc light in the road beyond were cast aslant it. She listened intently but not a sound came to her ears. The big clock on the farther side of the hall tick-tacked, tick-tacked the minutes away and presently struck one resounding boom which so startled Polly that she nearly tumbled down the six remaining steps, then laughed softly at her own fright. One-thirty! Goodness, how late it was! And so still and cold! It was silly to remain there imagining all sorts of foolish things. She would go back to bed where she belonged. Rising to her feet she was about to turn and creep softly back to her room when a sharp click seemed to turn her to stone. It came from the dining-room, and there was no mistaking it this time. Polly's eyes and ears were strained





SHE WAS ABOUT TO TURN AND CREEP SOFTLY BACK







to their utmost tension. Again that click, and following it the sound of a carefully raised window and—yes!—in the faint light a shadowy figure was discernible! Up went the window and a leg was thrust across the sill. Polly did not pause another instant. Like a silent, avenging wraith she fled up the stairs, back to her room. Her lips were compressed, her eyes blazing, her hands icy-cold from the nervous strain.

Not a sound came from her mother's or Constance's room. On the threshold of her den Polly paused to listen again. Only her mother's gentle breathing was audible. Swiftly, and without a sound, Polly caught up her precious bugle and fled back to her own room. She did not pause one second; all her plans had been formulated in that brief flight up-stairs. Speeding from her room, she entered a guest-room situated exactly over the dining-room, and disconnecting the burglar alarm, raised the window directly above the one their midnight visitor had entered, and the next moment the sharp, staccato notes of "warning call" rang out across the dark icy night, each note clear-cut and emphasized by the death-like silence, and by all the force of Polly's resolution and Polly's fear behind it.



Perhaps Gabriel's trump might have wrought greater consternation to the masked marauder and his confederate below stairs. Thus far all had been plain sailing for them, and, like all of their ilk, they had come to the Howland home with a very complete knowledge of the number and sex of its inmates, as well as with a pretty clear idea of what they were likely "to pull off on the job." But the silver bugle had not entered into their calculations, and now it wrought their complete undoing. If they had entered silently, their exit certainly was not noiseless. One went the way he came, but the other went clean through a plate-glass window, and the crash mingled with the incessant calls of the bugle.

At the first note Mrs. Howland and Constance were out of bed. Mrs. Howland instantly flashed on every light in the house by turning the switch at the head of her bed, and as Constance rushed toward the sound of Polly's bugle, the whole situation rushed through her mind.

"Polly! Little sister! What is it?" she called, as she ran into the guest-room.

"Quick! Phone to the police-station! There they go! Look after mother! I'm all right!" and again the warning call rang



out, this time answered by a watchman's whistle and the sharp report of a revolver from up the road. Polly had not only summoned the night watchman, but had roused the coachman and groom on Colonel Hancock's estate. That bugle call was too well known in the neighborhood not to be instantly recognized, and when heard at such an untoward hour, its message was full of dire significance. In a good deal less time than it has taken to relate it, Colonel Hancock's men, one of whom had formerly been his orderly, were in hot chase after two fleeing figures, and it was Brennan's shot which called a summary halt to one, and caused the other to fling up his hands when that decisive young Irishman's voice commanded him so to do. Brennan had served seven years on the plains under Colonel Hancock and did not speak twice. Fifteen minutes after Polly's timely warning the two ring-leaders of the gang which had terrorized Montgentian for the past six weeks were fast bound and in the custody of Colonel Hancock, Brennan, and the coachman awaiting the arrival of the officers from Montgentian.

And meanwhile what of Polly?

Although a trifle white and shaky as she



sat on the couch in her den, with Mrs. Howland asking a dozen questions, she was by no means in a panic.

"My dear, dear little girl, *why* did n't you call me first?" she said tenderly, as she slipped her arms about the blue-clad figure.

Polly nestled close as she answered:

"There was no time to call anybody, and no reason to scare *you* half to death any way."

"But you could have called *me*, dear!" protested Constance, coming from her room, where she had been scrambling into some clothing a trifle warmer than her night dress, and now handed her mother an extra shawl to put over her wool kimono.

Polly shook her head negatively, but before she could reply there came the sound of trampling feet upon the piazza and voices demanding admittance. The police had arrived and with them Colonel Hancock.

It was no time to think of toilets, and the maids, who had just come hurrying down from their rooms upon the third floor, ran downstairs to open the door.

For the next half hour everybody talked at once, but at length the facts of the situation were made clear.

When Colonel Hancock had listened to



Polly's simple version of the facts and her terse ending: "And that's all there is to it! Just nothing after all!" he clapped her upon her shoulder, crying:

"Bully for you, Polly! You and your Colors saved the day—*no*, night!"

"I don't think *I* did it at all; I think it was the fudge and a pretty bad stomach-ache!" answered Polly.



## CHAPTER XVI

### OFF FOR HAMPTON ROADS

IF Polly had ever doubted her right and title to the name given her, her doubt must have been dispelled after the experiences of that January night, for she literally "awoke one morning to find herself famous," though it is not to be supposed that sleep came readily to the eyes of any member of the Howland household during the remaining hours of that eventful night. Nevertheless, at about four, when the excitement had subsided, and Colonel Hancock, and those who had arrived hotfoot upon the scene, had gone their several ways, Mrs. Howland insisted upon her household settling down in their beds, and, sleep falling gently upon eyes on the hither side of life's quarter century, Polly and Constance were soon in shadowland, although Mrs. Howland did not find her journey thither so quickly accomplished.



When Polly reached school that morning she was met by such an ovation that she hardly knew whether to be annoyed or pleased. As the story had journeyed it had gathered like a snowball, until its exaggerations were astounding, and Polly began to wonder whether she were just Polly Howland, or some heroine from an ancient mythological tale, and whether she had merely routed a couple of burglars by a timely call upon her bugle, or held up half a dozen desperadoes at the muzzle of a revolver, so had the report of the night's adventure grown within eight hours.

"My goodness, *I* did n't do a single thing worth making such a fuss about!" cried Polly, when about twenty girls had swarmed upon her and had a rapture.

"Well, I just guess you *did!*" cried one.

"I should have died and fainted of fright!" said another.

"I'd never have *dared* put my nose outside my door, much less run downstairs with a revolver after a robber!" added a third.

"Why, I never did anything of the kind! Who told you such a crazy story as that?" cried Polly.

And so the tales circulated, but one thing



was certain: Polly, figuratively speaking, had surely won her spurs.

But nine days' wonders always give way to the newest sensation, and this time it was a letter from Snap. He had written very regularly, and at Christmas had come some pretty tokens of his love for each member of the family and for Ralph. Best of all, however, was his second contribution to the P. V. S. Society: another check for twenty-five dollars, and a letter so filled with enthusiasm over Polly's description of the Club, and suggestions for it, that Polly could hardly wait until a meeting could be called to impart the joyous news.

It was received with wild acclamations. Naturally the Christmas recess had for a time interfered with the Club's activities, but with the opening of the new term in January they were renewed with greater zest than ever, and each Friday saw the members congregated in the Board Room and some branch of the Club work well in hand. Just now, however, the keenest interest of all was under discussion and this was the proposed trip to Hampton Roads to welcome the Fleet.

Since its initial meeting in November the Club's membership list had grown amaz-



ingly. First the "Originals" were increased by twelve, not long after eight more were added, and at their first meeting in the New Year fifteen more were elected, making a total membership of forty-seven, by far the largest club in the school.

Now came the question as to how many of the members, and which ones, should go to Hampton Roads as Snap so earnestly wished, and it was rather a hair-splitting one to answer for a good many reasons.

How to decide which members should be chosen was exciting no little discussion.

Perhaps a third could have gone without giving the matter a second thought so far as the expenses of the trip were concerned; another third could have done so by some sacrifice upon the part of their parents; but the remaining third would have found it quite impossible. So which ones would go and which remain at home was the question of the hour since, obviously, all could *not* go.

"My gracious, it's just like the nursery rhyme of, 'This little pig went to market; This little pig stayed at home!'" cried Polly, as the four Club officers were talking the matter over while waiting for the other members to arrive on the Friday following Polly's momentous bugle call.



"There is only one way to settle it," insisted Ralph, "and that is by vote, just as Mr. Hunter said. We'd *all* like to go, of course, but we all know it's clear out of the question. So we'll get busy as soon as the others show up, and settle the whole thing hot off the bat."

"Well, whatever we do has got to be done mighty quick, I tell you, for Old Point is just going to hum that week and to get accommodations will keep somebody guessing. Where are you going to stop, Polly? Your people will go, of course, and that means you too," asked Harry Hull.

"Mother has secured a big room at the Chamberlain, and Aunt Janet is to be there too. Aunty wrote weeks ago. We have all got to share mother's, but it's a big one, so we don't mind for the little while we'll be there. But I tell you one thing, their prices are going to fly up just like sky-rockets for that week, and if we expect to get anything at all, we've got to do it right off."

"Then let's begin," said Ralph, as the room began to fill with the other members.

That was a busy afternoon for the P. V. S.'s, but when it was over, their plans had taken a very definite form, and a rational



solution of the vexed question had been arrived at. By a large majority the original twelve were elected to form the "Visiting Committee" to welcome the Fleet, since a larger number was considered far too great a tax to impose upon Mrs. Howland, their chaperon. These were representative members, so the Club decided, and certainly deserved the honor and the pleasure.

Then the question of funds had to be settled, and this was a pretty serious one, but a decision was arrived at. It was agreed that it would be impossible to make the trip, spend five days at the Chamberlain, and meet the incidental travelling expenses on less than twenty-five dollars for each individual, a total of three hundred dollars for the round trip; a pretty sizable sum for twelve boys and girls to consider.

When the treasurer was asked to report the sum in hand; he stated:

Initiation fees of twelve charter members	\$60.00
Initiation fees of the twelve new members first chosen	60.00
Initiation fees of eight new members	40.00
Initiation fees of last fifteen members elected	75.00



Mr. Hunter's contribution	\$50.00
Sums donated by friends	30.00
Sums earned by various members and contributed to general fund	45.00
	<hr/>
Total	\$360.00
Expenses for Christmas Enter- tainment	10.00
	<hr/>
Balance on hand	\$350.00

"Three-hundred-fifty," said Ralph, "and out of it twelve of us to take one bite of three hundred. That does n't seem exactly a square deal to the rest of the bunch, does it?"

"If I instead of you were one of the 'Originals,' how would you feel about it, Ralph?" asked one of the newest members.

"I'd say *go* mighty quick!" was the unhesitating reply.

"Well, then, why should n't we say the same? Of course we'd all *like* to go, but we all *can't*, and the next best thing to seeing it ourselves will be to have you come home and tell us about——"

But she got no farther, for here Polly bounded to her feet, crying:



“Oh, girls and boys, I’ve had such a brilliant brain throb! Why did n’t some of us think of it before? Oh, if—if—I can only do it! No, I won’t tell one single thing about it yet, because I’ve got to talk it all over with brother Snap, but if it *can* be done it will be perfectly splendid and will be almost as nice as being there to see it in reality, and besides we would be able to pay back to the treasury nearly all the money the Club will spend to send us down to Hampton Roads. Oh, I tell you it is simply a great idea!”

Coax as they would, they could not get another word out of Polly, and at length gave it up. Then Ralph asked permission to make a proposal.

“Since it is all settled that we are to go, and we have about decided what the expense will be, what do you all say to inviting Mrs. Stone to go as the guest of the Club? Both Mr. and Mrs. Stone have been mighty nice to us ever since the Club opened. If it had n’t been for Mr. Stone we’d never have had this room, and Mrs. Stone worked like a trump at our Christmas dance. Maybe you did n’t know it, but I found out that she gave us that new ten-dollar bill which we found hanging on the tree and marked ‘For



the P. V. S.'s from an admiring friend.' And she has been mighty good to us all. Of course, it will take more for her hotel bill than for any single P. V. S., because we must get a room for her, but I guess we can get special rates if she goes as a chaperon. We'll try to anyhow. Suppose it costs us forty-one-fifty more? I think it would be worth it if you all think we can stand it. That would make the whole trip cost three hundred and forty-one dollars and fifty cents. It's an awful lot of money, I know, but how do you feel about it? Shall we vote on this before we adjourn?"

The vote was taken with enthusiasm and the motion carried with a rush which proved how popular Mrs. Stone was with the P. V. S.'s.

Now, we must appoint a committee to call upon Mrs. Stone and invite her, and I think we'd better ask Mr. Stone to look after the business end of all this for us. If those Chamberlain people get a notion they are corresponding with a School Club, they'll think we're just an easy mark and maybe put it all over us," was Harry Hull's practical suggestion.

"That's so," agreed Ralph. "So, now for the committee."



"Let's all four of us go. We all know Mr. and Mrs. Stone first-rate, and they'll be glad to hear all about this, I know," was Polly's suggestion.

This was agreed to, and when a few minor details had been talked over the meeting adjourned.

That evening the Committee of Four called at Mr. Stone's home and a heartier welcome, or warmer support in any undertaking, no committee ever met with. Mr. Stone plunged headforemost into the plan, eager as any boy to settle everything in the best and shortest time. He wrote the letter then and there, and gave it to Harry to mail on his way home.

Then came the invitation to Mrs. Stone.

To see her face flush with pleasure and her eyes shine with the anticipation of a girl would have been quite sufficient reward for her prospective hosts and hostesses, but when she clapped her hands delightedly and cried:

"Oh, how, how did you *ever* guess! Why, only last evening I was talking about this to Mr. Stone and wishing just as hard as ever I could wish that we might see the wonderful sight! Why, nothing so lovely has happened in ages! I'm sorry he cannot



get away to go with us, but I know he is just as happy to have me go as I am to accept your lovely invitation, and just as proud to think you wanted *me* for a chaperon. Why, when I offered to be one ever so long ago nothing half so delightful as this treat ever entered my head. But I want you to listen to some very sound sense, and if any protest arises, you must look for another chaperon right off—now listen—” as symptoms of revolt began to stir her visitors. “I will accept your hospitality so far as being your guest at the Chamberlain is concerned, simply because I know *you* will look elsewhere for a chaperone unless I let you do *something*, and—well—I mean to be the chaperone; at least, I mean to share the honor with Mrs. Howland though I fancy she’ll have about all she can attend to, but I shall insist upon paying my own travelling expenses—yes—hush!” as murmurs of opposition arose, “for that is only right and just. Had Mr. Stone and I gone, he would have had to dump his pockets inside-out to satisfy my rapacity, so he can thank his lucky stars at getting off so easily! So, my men and maids, ‘no payee no goee,’ as John Chinaman would tell you, and I’m just as pleased as Punch, and just a



thousand times obliged to every one of you. And here's to prove it," and Mrs. Stone sprang from her chair to catch Polly in her arms and kiss each cool, rosy cheek, and follow it up with Betty.

There was a queer startled expression upon the boys' faces as though they feared her enthusiasm might include them in this form of demonstration, but their panic was groundless, for turning to them she offered each a warm handclasp, saying:

"I'm so proud of you both! So proud and so honored!"

The days which followed were busy ones.

As soon as possible all arrangements were made, and when the cold clear morning of February 20, 1909, dawned, the railway station at Montgentian fairly hummed, for not only had every Club member assembled to speed the "Originals" upon their way, but half the town as well.

Their train for Washington left the Pennsylvania Station at seven-thirty, and this necessitated a seven o'clock start from Montgentian. It was still dark and very cold, but that had little effect upon the crowd's enthusiasm, and amidst hoorahs and good-byes they set forth.

There is no need to describe the novelty



or delights of that journey of fourteen hours. It was a long one, but nobody—not even the grown-ups—found it tiresome.

How could they, with twelve such happy young people who were more than ready to lend them their eyes to see all that was wonderful or interesting, to share with them the enthusiasm which only youth can know, to season their luncheon with the sauce of good cheer and boys' and girls' appetites!

They nearly filled one parlor-car and furnished enough entertainment for their fellow-passengers to have served as an inducement for the railroad to quote even lower rates than those Mr. Stone had already succeeded in securing for the party, thanks to Mr. Hull's influence with the road's president, whose interest was instantly aroused, and who, in his turn, put in a word with the Chamberlain management and naturally lessened charges there, so that when the Club's treasurer footed up expenses when the frolic was over, he found that instead of the three hundred and twenty-five dollars he had counted upon for the trip, for owing to Mrs. Stone's determination to meet her own travelling expenses the original outlay counted upon had been considerably lessened, it



had been finally brought down to two hundred and seventy-five.

The party was too tired to do more than justice to a fine dinner and turn in for a sound sleep that Saturday night. There were two rooms allotted to the boys, and two to the girls, a double and single bed in each room providing luxurious accommodations, so all agreed. Polly insisted upon sharing Betty's and Nancy's, while Eleanor Russell, Helen Loder, and Alice Powell took the one communicating with it.

"Oh, does n't it seem too splendid to be true!" cried Betty, as she snuggled down under the bedclothes with Polly.

"I wonder if we'll wake up and find it a dream?" was Polly's answer.

"Go to sleep quick and that'll make Monday come faster!" was Nancy's practical advice.



## CHAPTER XVII

### WELCOME HOME!

WHEN the morning of February 22d dawned upon Hampton Roads, a fog heavy enough to dampen the enthusiasm of any crowd excepting the one which filled the hotel lay upon the water. But these people had come to welcome the fleet which had "done the trick," and the fact that "the trick" had been done by hundreds of husbands, sweethearts, brothers, or sons of the eager throng on shore only made that throng the more eager to cry "Welcome home!"

Everything was hurry-scurry that morning. True it was cold and bleak for Old Point Comfort—"Dis-Comfort," one wag stigmatized it,—but furs were plenty, rain-clothes everywhere in evidence, and light hearts made warm bodies, so what more could be desired? If the festive attire to which the feminine portion of that gathering had given so much thought during the preceding weeks could not be "broken out"



on this damp day, why, other days would follow and some of them were bound to be sunny.

Long before there was the slightest hope of breakfast, much less a start, Polly and Betty were wide-awake. Creeping from their bed they ran to the window to peer out into the darkness. Not a sound, not a sign of living thing!

“Let’s wake Nancy and we’ll all get dressed early and be ready to go out the minute they’ll let us. Oh, Betty, I’m nearly wild and crazy at the thought of it all!—are n’t you?” and Polly flew at Betty to gather her into a regular bear hug.

“Don’t talk to me! I could n’t stand another bit of anticipation without flying all to pieces!” answered Betty, snatching up a pillow to hurl it across the room at the motionless figure in the other bed. The shot went true to the mark and up came Nancy’s head as, only half awake, she beat the air wildly to ward off her invisible enemy, and cried:

“Who is it? What do you want? Go away!” and then, fully awakened by the laugh which greeted her impromptu performance, jumped out of bed to join in the scramble of dressing. Before they were



ready to leave their room the other three girls banged on the door communicating, and in another minute the boys' voices shouted a good-morning from the hall. A moment later, Mrs. Stone, Mrs. Howland, Mrs. Harold, Constance, and Gail joined them, and the party made its way to the dining-room, where a buzz of excitement testified to the tension of all gathered there.

Mr. Stone, with his usual forethought, had arranged for one large table for Mrs. Howland's party, and before the grapefruit was eaten there came an interruption which brought every girl and boy to his or her feet. It was only the dull boom of a gun, but as the sound was borne to them from far out over the water every heart thrilled, and pulses beat many beats the faster.

"It's the ships! It's the fleet!" cried a chorus.

"Oh, come quick! Let's go out! Never mind breakfast!" urged Polly, wildly.

"Pollykins, do you expect me to meet the excitement of the ensuing nine hours of daylight, to say nothing of considerable which is likely to fill the dark ones, on *one* grapefruit? Nay, nay! That menu is entirely too tempting!" was Mrs. Stone's merry veto to this proposal.



"Not a bit of it," echoed Mrs. Howland, while Constance and Gail added the most practical suggestion of all by saying:

"Get busy and *eat*, every single one of you, and when you're all serenely full you'll be ready to stand the strain, for you'd better believe there's going to be one."

"That gun is on the fort, honey," explained Mrs. Harold. "You'll know when the ships arrive, let me tell you. That one poor little gun will be put out of commission."

It was hard to settle down to anything so mundane as breakfast when all the world was a-buzz with eager anticipation, and down at the dock one of the trimmest little steam-yachts was waiting to carry this party of seventeen out over the water toward Cape Henry. The yacht had been a complete surprise even to Mrs. Harold, for not until she reached the Chamberlain did she learn that the *Frolic* had been placed at her disposal by her husband's friend, Senator ——. The telegram, letter, and yacht itself awaited her upon her arrival at Old Point.

Within an hour all were on board, and the *Frolic* was poking her nose in and out among the hundreds of tugs and craft get-



ting under weigh to steam after the *Mayflower*.

All the world knows the story of the fleet's return. How the gallant little *Mayflower* made her way through the fog until, off Cape Henry, the *Connecticut* loomed up, mighty, majestic, imposing. The moment the President's yacht hove in sight, the salute of twenty-one guns was fired, and as the other ships loomed up out of the fog and smoke each in turn boomed out its welcome to the nation's ruler, while whistles and sirens upon tugs, yachts, and launches shrieked their welcome to the home-comers. Then, in honor of the nation's founder, George Washington, a simultaneous salute of twenty-one guns was fired by the fleet.

Never would the little party upon the *Frolic* forget that sight, for never again in all their lives would they be likely to see twenty-five superb battle-ships steaming in line up the mighty waterway with only four hundred feet between them, all dressed in cruising fashion,—a huge American flag at each masthead, the Union Jack a-flutter, and streaming flags in place at every lofty gaff; on the bridge, officers with drawn swords and in special full-dress uniforms, as the *Connecticut* steamed toward the *Mayflower*;



sailors in blue manning the rails "close aboard." Shoulder to shoulder, they stood stiffly at attention along the sides of the sixteen-thousand-ton ship, an almost unbroken human line from forecastle to quarter-deck. On the quarter-deck a marine guard was drawn up, while bugles called to attention. At the heels of the *Connecticut* followed a seven-mile line of fighting vessels.

As her great prow reached the bridge of the President's yacht, the band played "The Star-Spangled Banner," and President Roosevelt doffed his hat to salute the flag.

That was a wonderfully impressive moment, for, at the first thrilling note, each shrieking whistle and siren was hushed and every cheer silenced. Hardly an eye could see clearly, and into each throat sprang a strange lump which made speech impossible, for the great ships with their thousands foregathered from every State in the Union had come

Home!

The captain of the *Frolic* had made a good start, and kept his yacht well in the lead, thus giving his party a fine chance to



see the flagship. Mrs. Howland, with Mrs. Stone beside her, stood eagerly scanning the deck of the *Connecticut*. Mrs. Harold had many friends on board each ship. Constance held her aunt's hand and peered off through the mist to discern the second division of the first squadron, for the last, or eighth, ship of that division was the *Rhode Island*, and none, not even the flagship, could mean to Constance quite what that ship meant, for it carried her—heart.

Polly was in the group toward which Gail had naturally gravitated, for Gail was not too old to find her niche among the "Originals," and, moreover, had always been a prime favorite with Ralph and Harry.

Polly and Betty with arms locked stood lost to everything but the majesty of that wonderful naval review, and not until the *Rhode Island* came abreast of them could they join in the wild acclamations shouted by all around them.

Long before any one else saw him, Constance had discovered Snap among the officers, and into her eyes sprang the light which only one emotion on God's dear earth can bring there, and upon her cheeks flooded the soft rich color which told of the hidden heart-throbs.



Polly was the next to see him, and Polly was not one to stand upon ceremony. With one glad cry, utterly oblivious of the space dividing them, she stretched forth her arms calling:

“Brother Snap! Oh, brother Snap! Look at me! Look at me!” and as though love had bridged distance, and mental telepathy proved as effectual as wireless telegraphy, Snap saw, if he did not hear her, and straight to two waiting, loving hearts shot his glance. And what did ceremony count then? Had the world ceased revolving in consequence, Snap must have waved a greeting to the little yacht.

A few hours later the great fleet had reached its anchorage. Bugle calls sounded, anchors plunged into the water as the massive chains tore through the hawse-pipes. Then each ship broke out its rainbow dressing of lines of flags strung from stem to stern—their full dress in honor of the President and Washington’s Birthday when resting in port.

Back to Old Point, Hampton, or Newport News hurried the numberless yachts and launches to land their passengers, damp as to garments, but their ardor far from dampened.



Then for two miserable days the patience of those on shore, as well as those on board, was taxed to the utmost by a heavy storm which prevented those on board from going ashore or people from visiting the ships. True, the big dinner given at the Chamberlain by the members of the Navy League took place that evening, but this included only the highest officers and their families and only Mrs. Harold attended.

But at length came clear weather and the dangerous, stormy harbor was considered safe for launches. Then early one morning, when the twelve "Originals" had rushed off down to the dock in the hope of some cheering news from the ships, their eyes were gladdened by the sight of one of the ship's launches ploughing through the water straight toward the dock. When first sighted she was too far offshore for the eager group to distinguish the name on her bow, but presently Ralph, whose sight was unusual, snatched off his cap and with a veritable Indian whoop sent it flying into the air.

"It's the *Rhode Island's* launch! It's the *Rhode Island's* launch!"

That ought to have been enough, but when those keen eyes made out a figure which at





“BROTHER SNAP! DEAR, DEAR BROTHER SNAP!”







that moment stepped up to the rail from the stern-sheets and laying hold of the life-line to steady himself looked eagerly toward the dock, the group seemed to take leave of its senses. The next second the figure on the rail had snatched off his cap with his free hand, and was waving it and shouting lustily. Snap was coming ashore with a liberty party.

Sharp and short were the orders given as the launch swung alongside and Snap bounded up the gangway of the dock, but shrilly above the confusion of voices sounded Polly's cry of:

"Brother Snap! Dear, dear brother Snap!"

"Little sister! Little Captain!" and Polly was gathered into an embrace which gave testimony of the love which prompted it.

But it was Polly who remembered. As Snap greeted Ralph and was introduced to the others Polly whispered:

"Talk to them just a few minutes while I run back and tell Connie. She does n't know, of course, and she won't want to meet you with all the others around. Go right to Aunt Janet's parlor; I'll get Connie there somehow; it's on the second floor, number 297."



Polly never forgot the look of gratitude in Snap's eyes as he answered:

"Little sister, I'll never forget this as long as I live, but—please be quick! I've waited eight whole months for this day!"

Polly fled toward the hotel. How she managed it she never told, but Snap and Constance had an uninterrupted half hour in Mrs. Harold's parlor. At the end of it Snap said:

"Sweetheart, send Carissima to me. She comes next to you, and then I want 'the little Mother,' for she was my first friend up there at Annapolis."

As though to make amends for its surly mood, the weather cleared and grew mild enough for every one to be out-of-doors, and all that morning the launches from the ships, as well as hundreds of others, darted to and fro, like water-bugs, carrying people out to the ships or bringing officers and men ashore. A little later Lieutenant-Commander Harold came ashore and joined the party. Up to that moment Mrs. Harold had scarcely been able to exchange a word with him so closely had his duties on board held him.

He and Snap divided the honors, and were the centre of interest, for there were a thou-



sand questions to be asked and answered. It was well for the party that Mrs. Harold had made her reservation at the Chamberlain weeks before, or she would never have been able to offer the hospitality of a parlor to this party. All gathered in it, and, characteristically grouped, listened to Mr. Harold as he sat with Mrs. Harold's hand fast clasped in his, and Mrs. Howland upon his other side, for Mrs. Howland had always been like an older sister to him. On a settee just opposite him Snap sat between Constance and Polly, an arm encircling each, "for, I can't be ceremonious to-day," said Snap. "It's too wonderful a day; a regular red-letter one in my life."

"You can't tell *me* anything about it, son," replied Mr. Harold, "for I've got something right here to jog my memory as to what it all means to you," and he raised Mrs. Harold's hand to press his lips to it.

"I've two anchors, sir," replied Snap, pressing his lips to Polly's head nestling so lovingly against his shoulder.

"Good thing! Don't slip either! But now a word about all *this*," and he nodded toward Mrs. Stone, Gail, and the eleven "Originals" seated or squatted all about the room, for chairs had given out and the



boys had dropped upon the floor in the unconsciously picturesque poses only possible to boys.

"Yes, sir, I want to give them the time of their lives!" said Snap. "Something they'll remember as long as they live! Ralph, here, is my special protégé, and I mean to see him a captain when I go on the retired list; Polly is one already. By-the-way, Polly, how's the bugle? Did you bring it?"

"Oh, no! Of course not!" cried Polly.

Then the story of the bugle was told Mr. Harold, who listened with the keenest interest, while Polly, greatly embarrassed, snuggled down upon Snap's shoulder to hide her flaming cheeks. Then followed the story of the Club, of the offices held by Polly and others, each "Original" forgetting to be shy in Mr. Harold's presence as the enthusiasm for the Club grew, and it would indeed have been difficult for any boy or girl to hold aloof from Mr. Harold. He loved young people as his wife loved them, and instantly won them.

And they never suspected how much they were telling him, though each in turn had something special to relate. The morning was nearly gone before any one realized it,



and had not Snap suddenly wakened to the fact that he was due on board at one o'clock they might have talked on till dark.

"I'll go back with you, son," said Mr. Harold, laying a kindly hand upon Snap's broad shoulder. There was a moment's silence, then he turned and taking Constance's face in both his hands said:

"So you are going to take this big boy in charge, are you, little girl? Well, let me tell you he's worth it. When I have time, I'll tell you a few nice things about him that it would n't be well for him to hear. You've always been like a daughter to Aunt Janet and me, and now he will be like our son, God bless you both!" and a tender kiss rested upon Constance's forehead.

"Good-bye. Captain Polly! Captain! By Jove, I've an idea! The most brilliant ever, but I can't breathe a hint of it! Got to talk it over with some one who has always been as much to me as I mean to be to this big brother-to-be of yours, Polly. Come on, Hunter. Time's growing short. See you all at the dance to-night, and maybe I can give the orders for to-morrow then."

"Oh, what, what is it, Uncle Glenn?"

"Big secret! Good-bye!" and Mr. Harold and Snap fled.



## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE GREATEST DAY OF ALL

To Constance Howland the trip to Old Point meant a good deal more than such trips usually mean. She had spent the previous winter at Annapolis with her aunt, Mrs. Harold, her mother's only sister, and, as we already know, had returned to her home in Montgientian the fiancée of Harry Hunter. Mr. Harold, now a lieutenant-commander, had left Annapolis in the autumn of 1907 to join his ship, then at a Pacific station, but upon the arrival at San Francisco of the battle-ship fleet had been transferred to the *Rhode Island*, Hunter's ship, to the great satisfaction of all concerned. He had now returned with his ship to Hampton Roads, and this fact meant a royal good time for the party which had hurried down to Old Point to welcome the fleet, and especially for the young people.

Mrs. Harold had spent her winter at



Wilmot Hall and had sorely missed her companion of the previous year. Consequently, this reunion gave her more genuine delight than any one realized. She and Constance had already found time for more than one little chat together, and the morning after Mr. Harold's and Snap's visit they were in Mrs. Harold's parlor while the others were gathered upon the hotel piazza.

"Connie, girlie, let me get one good look at you. It seems ages since I've had you alone for one single minute," said her aunt, holding Constance at arm's length. "How do you suppose I've managed to get on all this winter without you after having had you all last? Do you remember what we were doing a year ago?"

"Oh, you have had your boys, Aunt Janet, and from what I hear from some of them, you've made 'Middies' Haven' more attractive than ever and been mighty good to your big children!"

"They are dear boys, every one of them, and mighty appreciative, although they don't always get the credit for being. But none will ever take Snap's place, honey! He is my own dear foster-son, and always will be. It seems almost too good to believe that he is actually right out there be-



yond our windows, and Glenn with him! Do you realize it, sweetheart?"

"Do I *realize* it! Do I realize it!" whispered the girl. "Oh, Aunt Janet, you'll never guess how long these months have seemed!"

"Don't you think I can guess? Honey, I've not forgotten what life was at twenty! But what is all this commotion?" she cried, as the rapid approach of many pairs of feet indicated something unusual, and the next second a rataplan upon her door indicated that those without desired to be numbered among those within.

"Come in! Spare the panel!" called Mrs. Harold, and in rushed the twelve "Originals," Polly crying:

"Oh, Aunt Janet! Aunt Janet, see what Uncle Glenn has done for us! Isn't it too, too splendid to believe!"

"And we're *all, all* included, Mrs. Harold! The whole twelve! Oh, I'm so glad we came that I won't be able to sleep for a week!" cried Betty, rushing around the room like an escaped whirlwind.

"Yes, and read this letter of invitation, Mrs. Harold. Written by the Admiral's Secretary, on the ship's paper and all A-1 right up to the mark. It will be preserved



in the archives of the P. V. S. Club, wherever they are—for—ever—and—ever!" was Harry's enthusiastic exclamation, for he had at once found his place with Mrs. Harold and fitted it exactly.

"Read that, please," added Ralph, thrusting the momentous letter into Mrs. Harold's hand.

U. S. S. "CONNECTICUT,"  
FEBY 24, 1909.

CAPT. POLLY HOWLAND, CAPTAIN  
OF THE P. V. S. CLUB, HOTEL  
CHAMBERLAIN, OLD POINT  
COMFORT, VA.

Dear Madam:

(Just here came an interruption in the form of an ecstatic screech from Polly, and "Is n't that perfectly splendid!")

Through my friend, Captain ——, I have had the pleasure of learning of the presence, at the Chamberlain, of the twelve members of the Pro Vexillo Scholaque Club of Montgentian, N. J., and have also been informed of the aim and object of the Club, which I most heartily approve and indorse, and in which I am keenly interested.

Owing to this interest, I am very desirous



of meeting the members and shall feel highly honored if they, with their chaperones, will join me at a most informal tea on board on Thursday afternoon at four o'clock.

I beg to remain,

Very respectfully yours,

---

"What! What!" cried Mrs. Harold when she had finished reading the important missive. "A letter of invitation straight from the Admiral of the Fleet! Why, Polly Howland, have you any idea of the honor which has been thrust upon you?"

Solemnly Polly walked up to her aunt, and as solemnly dropped down in a little heap at her feet. Then resting both hands upon Mrs. Harold's knees, and looking up into her face with a most awed expression, she answered:

"Aunt Janet, I'm just naturally petrified, I'm so proud and scared! Isn't it awful? Do you think we'd better go? I'm afraid I never could get through it without flying all to pieces!"

"Go! Why, Polly Howland, of course you will go! The idea of questioning it for a single moment! Send your note of acceptance without the least delay. Here,



Betty, you, as Secretary of the Club, must write it. Here are paper, pen, and ink. What more is necessary?"

"Brains, Mrs. Harold, and I have n't an ounce!" wailed Betty.

"Nonsense! Get busy!"

"Oh, how must I word it!" hesitated poor Betty, overwhelmed by the responsibility.

"How would you accept an invitation to any tea?"

"But *this* is n't *any* tea! It's the very tea of our lives!" cried Betty.

In due time the note of acceptance was composed, approved, and despatched, then for five mortal hours a fever of excitement consumed not only the "Originals" but the older members of the party as well. At three o'clock Snap came ashore in the Admiral's own launch to escort the party on board, and if ever twelve hearts were a-flutter, the twelve which, led by Snap, clambered up the starboard after-gangway of the superb battle-ship *Connecticut*, certainly were. Close behind them followed the chaperones. At the head of the gangway stood the officer of the deck and Mr. Harold, who greeted them and led them toward a group of officers upon the after part of the palm- and flag-bedecked



quarter-deck. Instantly the magnificently uniformed Admiral, accompanied by the captains of the *Connecticut* and the *Rhode Island*, stepped forward to welcome the visitors. Mr. Harold presented Polly first, then in their turns came Betty, Nancy, and the three other girls, followed by the six boys. Last the grown-ups came in for their honors, the young people stepping aside to make way for them.

With the grace and charm so inseparable from him, the Admiral conversed for a few minutes with each of his older guests, contriving at the same time to present to them the officers with whom they would sit at the tea-tables then turned once more to Polly, who never knew how she managed to get through the next three minutes. She was only conscious of looking up into a pair of kind, smiling eyes, of placing her hand in one which gave it a hearty clasp and hearing a genial voice say:

“Welcome aboard the *Connecticut*, fellow-officer, Captain Polly Howland,” while the splendid band played “Hail to the Chief!” Whether the musical selection was in honor of the Admiral or herself never entered Polly’s head.

Admiral — and the Captain of the



*Rhode Island* had been warm friends when stationed at the Naval Academy many years before, and the captain's eldest son bore the Admiral's name. Knowing the Admiral's interest in children, Captain —— had told him the story of the P. V. S. Club, as Mr. Harold had told it to him upon his return from his first visit ashore. Captain —— had asked many questions, and since Mr. Harold's own knowledge was somewhat limited, Snap had been called upon to fill in the details of the story of the Club, and the story had lost nothing by his telling, for he had several of Polly's letters to draw upon for information.

When all his older guests had been cared for, the Admiral once more turned to Polly and, gallantly offering his hand, said:

"May I have the honor?" By this time Polly was herself again, and the great Admiral was just a splendid elderly gentleman who was disposed to be chummy and charming. So with a smile like sunshine itself Polly placed her hand in his and was led by him to one of the many little wicker tables, followed by Betty and Ralph, while the other members of the party paired off into little groups of four at each of the ten tables, for only the Admiral, his staff, and



these specially invited guests were allowed on the quarter-deck this afternoon.

A prettier scene it would be hard to picture than the palm-embowered quarter-deck, with its daintily-gowned feminine guests, its uniformed officers, and the background of blue water, with twenty-five great battle-ships stretching out in a line more than two miles in length.

Before Polly knew how it had happened, she was chatting away with the Admiral as though she had known him all her life, while Betty dropped telling words of their Club and how they had all worked to earn their money to organize it.

“And what is to be the next step taken?” asked the Admiral, as he placed some dainty cakes upon Polly’s plate.

“Oh, something I want so much to do for them, because the Club members did all this for us. If they could only *be* here to see it all! If they only could!” cried Polly, clasping her hands and raising her eyes to the Admiral’s face. Polly never guessed the little thrill of pleasure which that glance of hers sent straight to his heart. For many months he had been under a terrific strain, either from his responsibilities as Commander-in-chief of the fleet, or from



ceremonious official entertainment or entertaining, and none realized how severe the tax upon him had been. Here was something truly novel and refreshing, for Polly had completely forgotten herself and was having a delightful time.

"Suppose you tell me all about it, then perhaps I can help to make it a reality. Do your friends know of this wish of yours?" he asked, turning to Betty.

"Not a single thing!" answered Betty.

"May we know it, Polly?" asked Ralph.

"Of course you may! The only reason I did not say anything about it was because it seemed almost impossible to carry it out, but now maybe it won't be," and Polly glanced confidently at her new friend, who nodded encouragingly. Then she continued: "May I tell you all about it? I'd love to, because you have been so dear to ask us all out here, and no matter how hard I tried to make the others up home understand how wonderful it all is, or how it looks to-day, I am sure I never could by just telling; no, not if I talked straight ahead for one whole month. So I thought if I could get brother Snap, I mean Midshipman Hunter,—do you know him real well?" and again the big gray eyes smiled up into



the Admiral's, while Ralph and Betty looked on in secret admiration, and wondered how in the world Polly could chat so chummily with the man who had led the great fleet on its cruise of forty-five thousand miles. But Polly had forgotten that "The Admiral" was anything more than a most agreeable companion, and the delighted man was smiling back at Polly as he said:

"I know Mr. Hunter, but I am afraid not 'real well,' for you see he is on the second division of the first squadron and rarely comes aboard the *Connecticut*."

"That is so; I forgot," answered Polly, as though Admirals and Midshipmen might ordinarily chum together, even though circumstances had made it impossible for Snap and this particular Admiral to do so. "Well, of course, he really is n't my brother yet, though he will be some day, and I love him dearly, dearly!"

"He is well worth it, and you have good reason to be proud of him too. He did a brave deed back there near Ceylon."

"Oh, what was it? Please tell us!" begged Polly.

"We should have lost one of our best gunners had it not been for him. We ran into rough weather and the man was washed



overboard. When the *Rhode Island* came along, Hunter saw him and went over after him. They were both picked up by one of the other ships. That required courage, little girl. And he is to be 'brother Snap,' is he? Which one?" and the Admiral nodded toward Constance and Gail who were seated upon the farther side of the deck:

"Connie, my eldest sister; the one next to Lieutenant Winter. Isn't she lovely?"

"She certainly is. I admire Mr. Hunter's choice. But we are forgetting all about this plan of yours. I am anxious to hear of it."

"If I could only manage somehow to have a stereopticon and show the Club the pictures of the fleet. There must have been a lot of photographs taken on the cruise, and if I could only get some of them, and then have some one tell us the story of it, it would be the next best thing to having been there, or being here. We could charge admission for outsiders and in that way pay back to the Club a lot of the money they gave us to come down here. It was such a lot, too, and I felt so small to accept it and all the good times when the others could not have them too! Don't you think it was just a



little—just a little—well, mean to take it?”

“Hardly that, although I can understand your view-point too. Suppose we see what we can do to correct it?” and the Admiral beckoned an orderly.

“My compliments to Mr. Belknap, and will he kindly bring his camera to the quarter-deck?” The orderly saluted and hurried away.

Presently a young officer came toward the Admiral's table and saluted.

“Mr. Belknap, I would like to present you to Miss Polly Howland, Miss Betty Stark, and Mr. Ralph Wilbur,” said the Admiral.

Mr. Belknap bowed in a manner which sent secret thrills through the girls' hearts, and then shook hands with Ralph.

“Mr. Belknap,” continued the Admiral, “these young people are anxious to carry back to their homes in Montgentian some little souvenirs of their visit to the flagship. You have, I know, taken a great many photographs of the fleet, and also of our ports of call. Will you kindly take one or two of the quarter-deck as it now appears with our charming guests? And will you oblige me by having slides made of them, and also of your series of photographs,



and send them with my compliments to Miss Polly Howland, at Montgentian, New Jersey?"

It was well Mr. Belknap's reply was brief and to the point, for Polly had come perilously near realizing her prediction to her Aunt Janet of "flying all to pieces." Only the stern necessity of keeping quiet long enough for Mr. Belknap to adjust his kodak and take his snaps saved the day.

Then Mr. Belknap was presented to the other members of the party, leaving the Admiral at liberty to resume his talk with his table guests.

"And they tell me you expect to enter the Academy within the coming two years?" he said to Ralph.

"I shall try to, sir. I want to, and I'll do my best," answered Ralph, earnestly.

"Bone hard, keep steady, love the flag, and you'll win out!"

"I can do the first, sir, and it won't be hard to do the other two with Polly to keep me head on. She is going to pull up on me like anything in high-school work this year, and jump right into second term Sophomore work next year unless——"

"Oh, Ralph! Hush!" protested Polly, blushing a rosy red.



"It's true! Every single word of it!" broke in Betty. "Polly can get ahead of every one of us and only half try."

"Betty, *will* you be quiet!" cried Polly.

"And how about the flag?" asked the Admiral, laughing heartily at Polly's embarrassment and her friend's staunch championship.

"Polly'd never speak another word to us if we forgot that for a single minute!" asserted Betty.

"How could we when she keeps it flying all the time?"

"How is that?" asked the Admiral.

"She has a staff in her grounds and raises and lowers the flag night and morning just as they do at Annapolis, and sounds the calls on her bugle!" explained Ralph, his face alight with enthusiasm for his boon companion, though that same companion was ready to dive under the little table.

"This is all very interesting, very. Tell me more, please," and the great man absently pushed aside the tea things to rest his arms upon the table, eager as a boy to hear a thrilling tale.

It was a funny, three-sided conversation which filled the ensuing fifteen minutes,



Ralph and Betty telling of their flag and Polly's devotion to it, while Polly herself begged them to stop, and almost rose from the table in her embarrassment at having to listen to her own praises.

"Come here, little girl," said the Admiral, drawing Polly into his circling arm. "Do you know you and your friends have given me a more interesting hour than I've had in many a long day? And shall I tell you why? Because you have unconsciously furnished the sequel to the big story the fleet has told the world: That it takes *men*, the truest, noblest, and best God can create to be worthy of the flag up there and to support it. Nor can men alone accomplish that, it needs *women* as well; women who love it, reverence it, will stand for and work for it, and, if necessary, sacrifice for it all that is dearest and most precious to them; women who will inspire, help, and elevate men to a man's very highest ideals of what manhood should be, because women hold absolutely the power to do this. And when they begin at your age, Captain Polly, and Lieutenant Betty, they have helped lay the corner-stone of our nation. This is serious talk for you young people, but if you can feel the love and reverence for your



country's flag that you have given such telling evidence of feeling, you can understand all I've said. You have given me a delightful hour. I shall not forget my visit from the twelve members of the P. V. S. Club, but I would like to ask one little favor of its captain. We both love the flag and the bugle calls. It is almost time for Colors now. It is customary to play the 'Star-Spangled Banner,' as you know, but will you sound the call for me instead this evening, Captain Polly? It will be a pretty ending to our delightful afternoon, and a very sweet memory to me for many days to come."

The Admiral paused and laying his big, strong hand over Polly's as it rested upon the tea-table, looked earnestly into her eyes.

For a moment Polly drew back in hesitation.

The very thought of sounding Colors on board the great battle-ship staggered her. But there was something in the kind eyes looking at her which struck straight to Polly's warm heart. The eyes looked tired in spite of their kindly expression. The hesitation was only momentary, then Polly forgot everything but the pleasure this new friend had made possible for her and her



friends, and was going to make possible for the other members of the Club back home in Montgentian. But for him, to-day would never have been in the annals of the Club.

Impulsively offering both hands, she cried:

“I’ll sound Colors for you, Admiral ——, if it takes every bit of wind I can pump into my lungs, and every speck of courage I can scare up, for if I blew until I was a hundred years old I could never, never begin to repay you for all you have done for us to-day!”

“I thank you,” was the simple reply, “and it is time. Come.”

In a few words the orders were given and the others were told of what was about to take place. A bugle was brought to Polly, and warning call having already been sounded, escorted by the Admiral, Polly walked toward the flag-staff at the taffrail. For one little moment a secret dread lest she fail,—lest, unfamiliar with the bugle, she would be unable to sound the ringing call sweet and true, as she did upon her own beloved instrument at home. Then she glanced above her head and saw Old Glory waving as it had waved each day of all the fifteen months of that wonderful cruise, and into



her soul flooded a love and reverence for it which banished all doubt, all fear, all self-consciousness, and whispering softly:

“Oh, you *are* dear to me! I *do* love you! I *do*!” she placed the bugle to her lips as the sailor loosened the halyards to lower away.

Never had that bugle call been sounded more tenderly, more sympathetically, more truly, for all Polly’s soul went into the call, and into more than one pair of eyes sprang a moisture not to be controlled, and more than one throat swelled with emotion. Old and young would remember that scene for many a long day.

And thus we, also, will remember Polly Howland until we greet her again in a new scene: Polly the lovable, Polly the enthusiast, sounding Colors on the great flagship, and for the flag she loved so dearly!















SEP 22 1870

Yea West Point!  
Yea Army!  
Three Cheers for the Army  
and Comrades!!  
Down with the Army!!







**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**



0002476459A